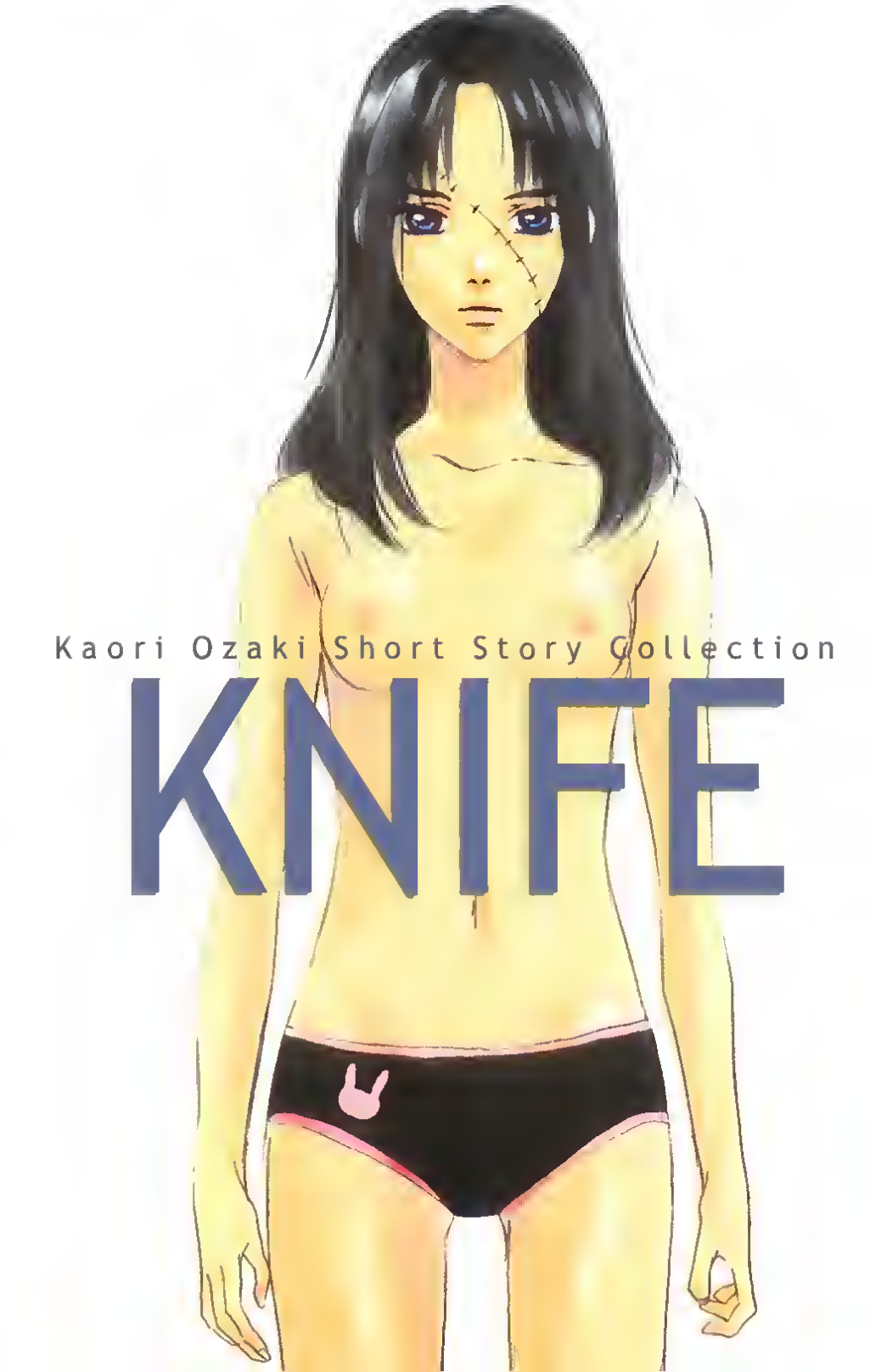
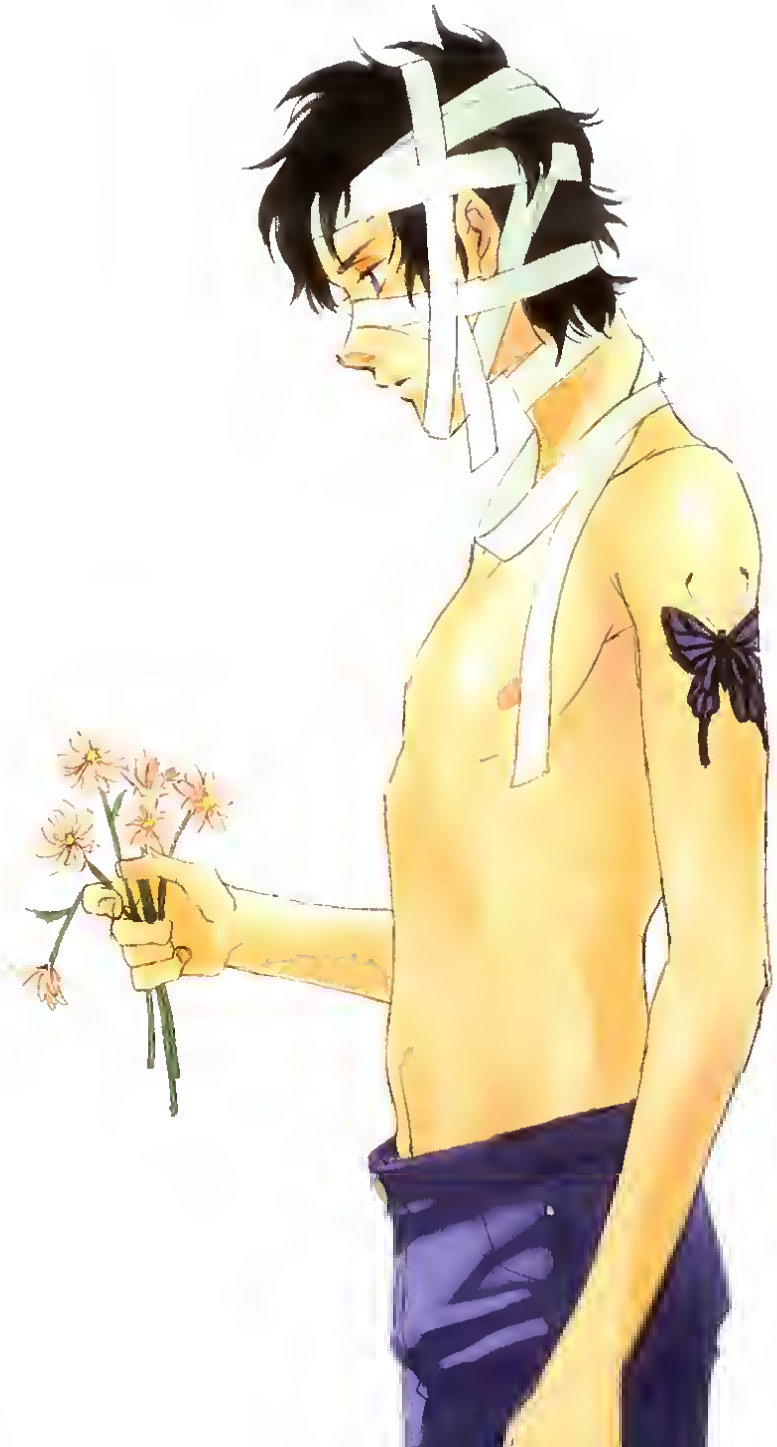
尾崎かおり

KAORI OZAKI



Kaori Ozaki Short Story Collection

KNIFE



尾崎かおり

KAORI OZAKI

Kaori Ozaki Short Story Collection

KNIFE

The Value of a Kiss ..003
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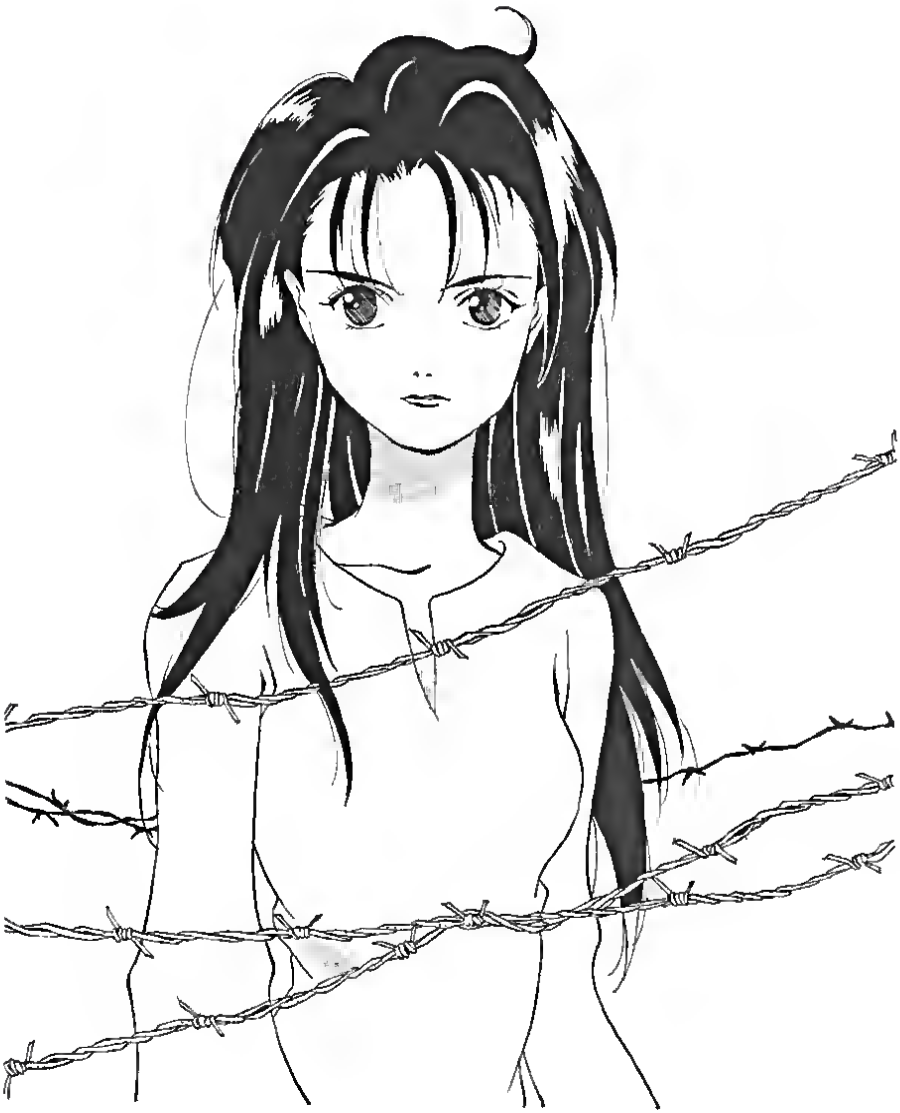
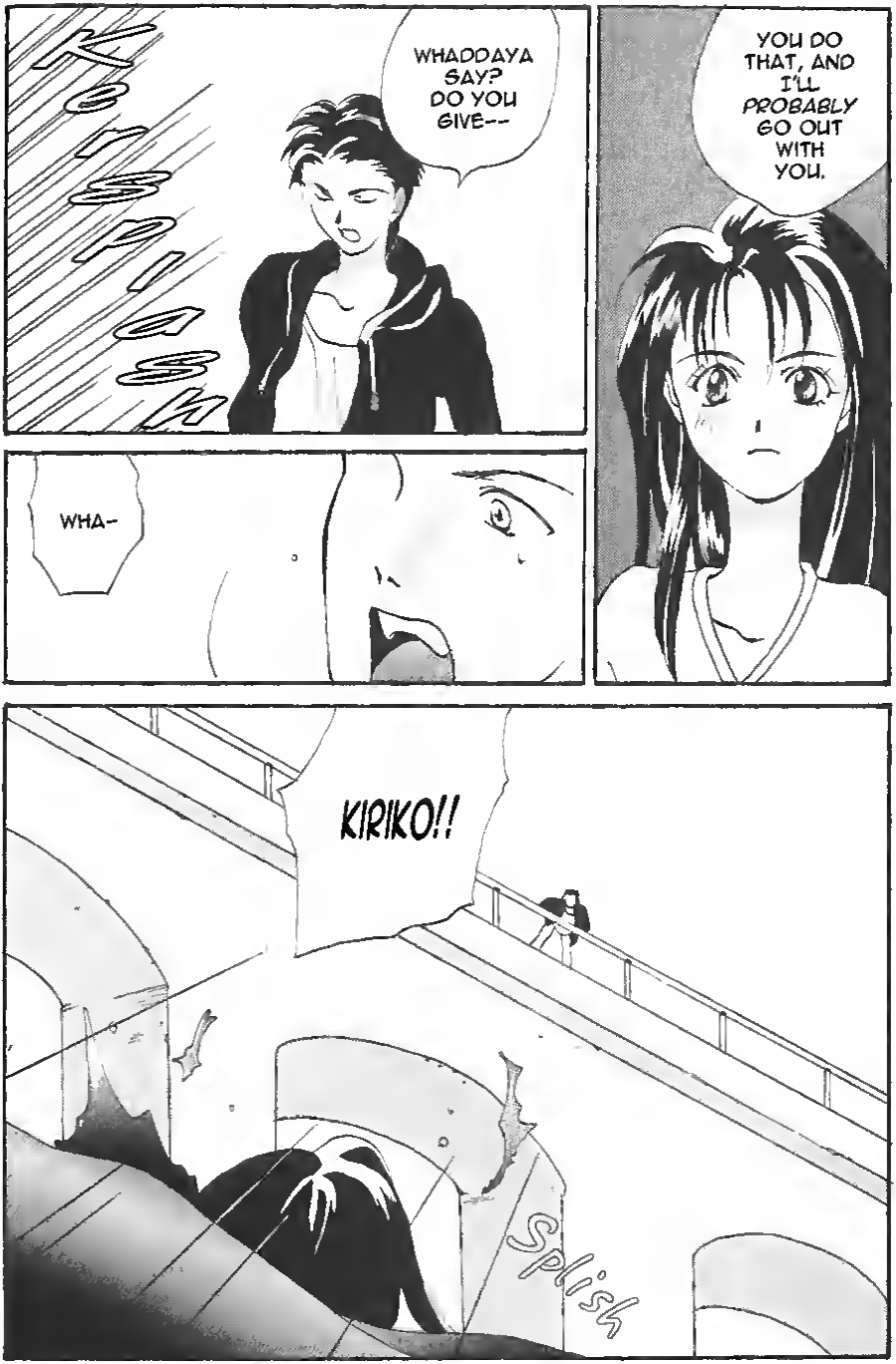
The Value of a Kiss



LOOK, WOULD YOU KNOCK IT OFF?!!
...ANOTHER GIRL, YOU KNOW!
HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP FOLLOWING ME!?
I'VE GOT A --
I'M NOT GONNA GO OUT WITH YOU.

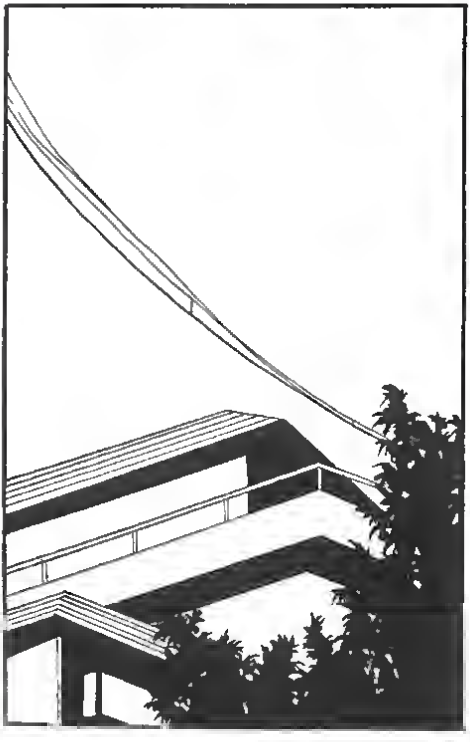
.....SO...
YOU REALLY LIKE ME THAT MUCH?
.....
stare
OKAY THEN...
★NODS★
JUMP OFF OF HERE

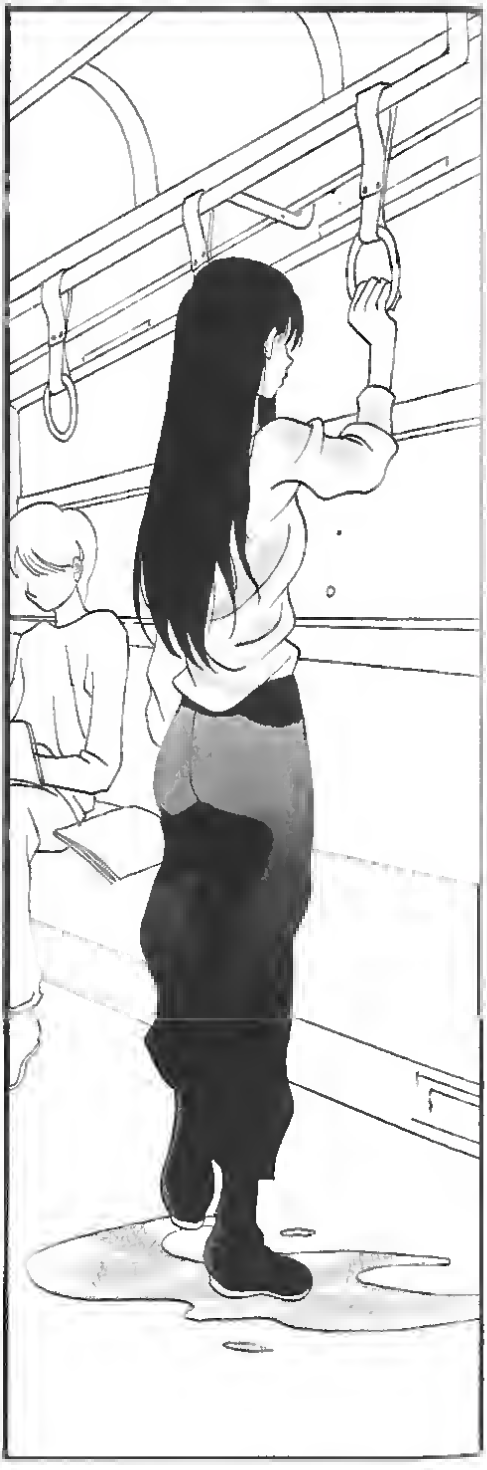

KISSING
WHADDAYA SAY? DO YOU GIVE--
YOU DO THAT, AND I'LL PROBABLY GO OUT WITH YOU.
WHA-
KIRIKO!!
Splish

KAI--!!
I LOVE YOU.
I LIKE YOU, KAI.

I LOVE YOU...
CLACKETY-CLACK
CLACK...
CLACK...
CLACKETY...
HEY... LOOK.
SO THEN I--

KIRIKO!!

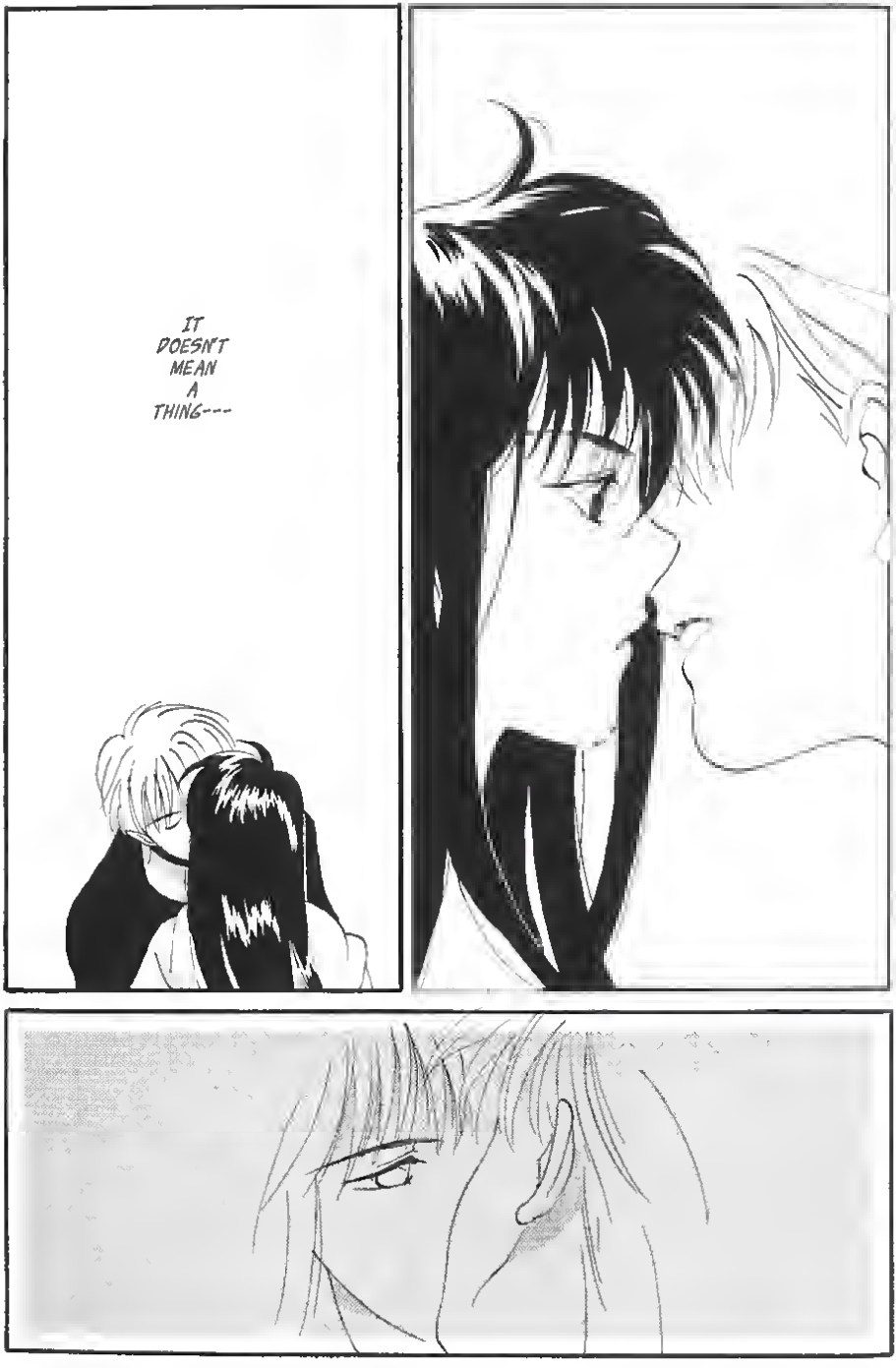




SHFF
SORRY TO INTRUDE LIKE THIS.
THAT'S MY BUSINESS.
Slurrrrp
LISTENING TO A GUY LIKE THAT, AGAIN...
YOU'RE A TOTAL IDIOT, YOU KNOW THAT?
SO WHAT'D KAI SAY THEN?
HE TOLD ME HE HATED MY GUTS.

HE TURNED DEAD WHITE AND CAME TO SAVE ME.
BUT...
SEE!? WHAT'D I TELL YOU!! HE'S JUST A--
THAT'S NOT EVEN... I DON'T CARE.
...WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO YOU?
IF HE TELLS ME TO DIE, THEN I'LL DIE.
I'M DOING THIS ON MY OWN. I'LL DO WHAT I WANT TO.

THAT DOESN'T MATTER.
I LIKE YOU.
.....
I'LL NEVER TELL YOU TO DIE.


IT
DOESN'T
MEAN
A
THING---

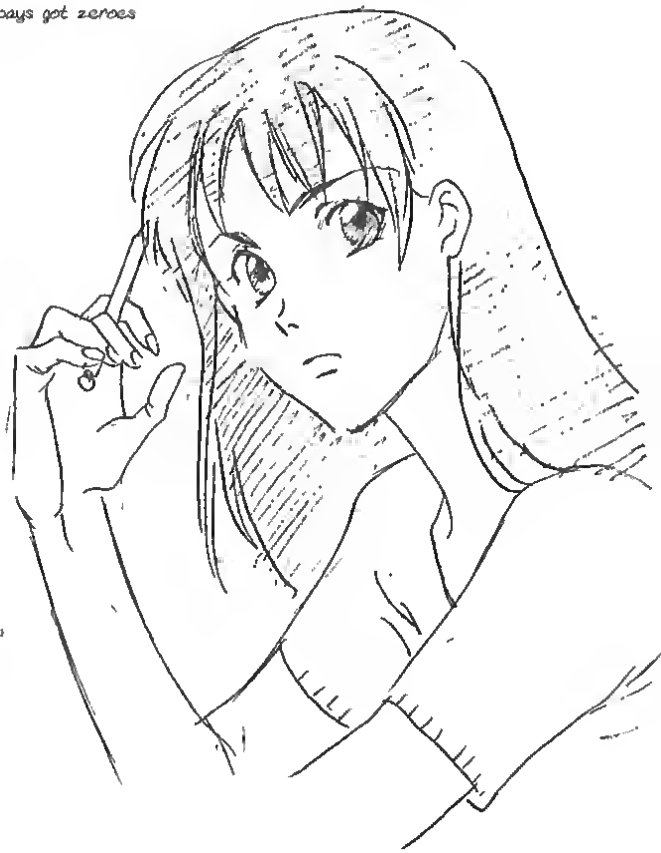
NOT
IF
IT
ISN'T
HIM...

The Value of a Kiss .END

The Value of a Kiss. 1993.

And there you have it. Frightening, isn't it. That was my debut work, from nine years ago. At the time, I had no intention of making manga professionally. I just scribbled this down, like a doodle, without much effort or any objective at all, and the thing was my first completed story. I sent it in somewhere, just because, and it somehow got picked for a prize for effort or something, and that's where everything began.

"Kiriko" was the girl who sat next to me in high school, and I used the way she looked then as my model for Kiriko. (Although she wasn't the type of girl who'd jump in a river, or anything.) She had strong-willed eyes and a small, prim mouth, and she was really gorgeous. I spent most of my classes staring at her profile, ignoring the teachers. That'd be why I always got zeroes on my quizzes.



Kiriko
Special ability:
pen-twirling

I DON'T NEED ONE SINGLE THING
NOT A THING, EXCEPT FOR YOU

WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THIS DIAGRAM?
LOOK AT THE PICTURES AND ANSWER MY NEXT QUESTION WITH 'YES' OR 'NO'...
KASE AYUMI SIXTEEN YEARS AND SEVEN MONTHS OLD GUILTY OF STABBING A TEACHER TO DEATH
...FEET ON THE FLOOR, PLEASE
AN ABSOLUTELY INSCRUTABLE GIRL
clatter

WHY DID YOU STAB HIM?
WELL, THERE'S ONLY ONE THING WE REALLY WANT TO KNOW.
.RIGHT. YOU DON'T LIKE TESTS

WHY DID YOU STAB HIM, WHEN YOU LOVED HIM?
WE'VE BEEN TOLD THAT YOU AND THE DECEASED TEACHER WERE IN A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

I FIGURED I'D KILL HIM AND EAT HIM
REPEATING INSCRUTABLE WORDS AND ACTIONS

GET A SEDATIVE--
SHE WAS SET UPON BY PERIODIC BOUTS OF CONFUSION
HE'S NOT DEAD! YOU'RE LYING!
LET ME SEE HIM!
LET ME SEE HIM!
...AND SANK INTO A STATE OF EXTREME MANIC-DEPRESSION

DOCTOR!! KASE-SAN ISN'T--
IF YOU'D GIVE US A BIT MORE TIME...
SHE'S STILL IN A STATE WHERE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH HER
YOU SEE..
AND THEN, ONE DAY

...LIKE AN ILLUSION, SHE VANISHED.
CA... CALL THE POLICE.
YES SIR.
PANT
PANT
GASP

YOU'RE SICK, MISTER BLUE

SOMEBODY SAID THAT.

I DON'T CARE IF THEY HATE ME, THOUGH, SO LONG AS I CAN LEAVE A MARK.

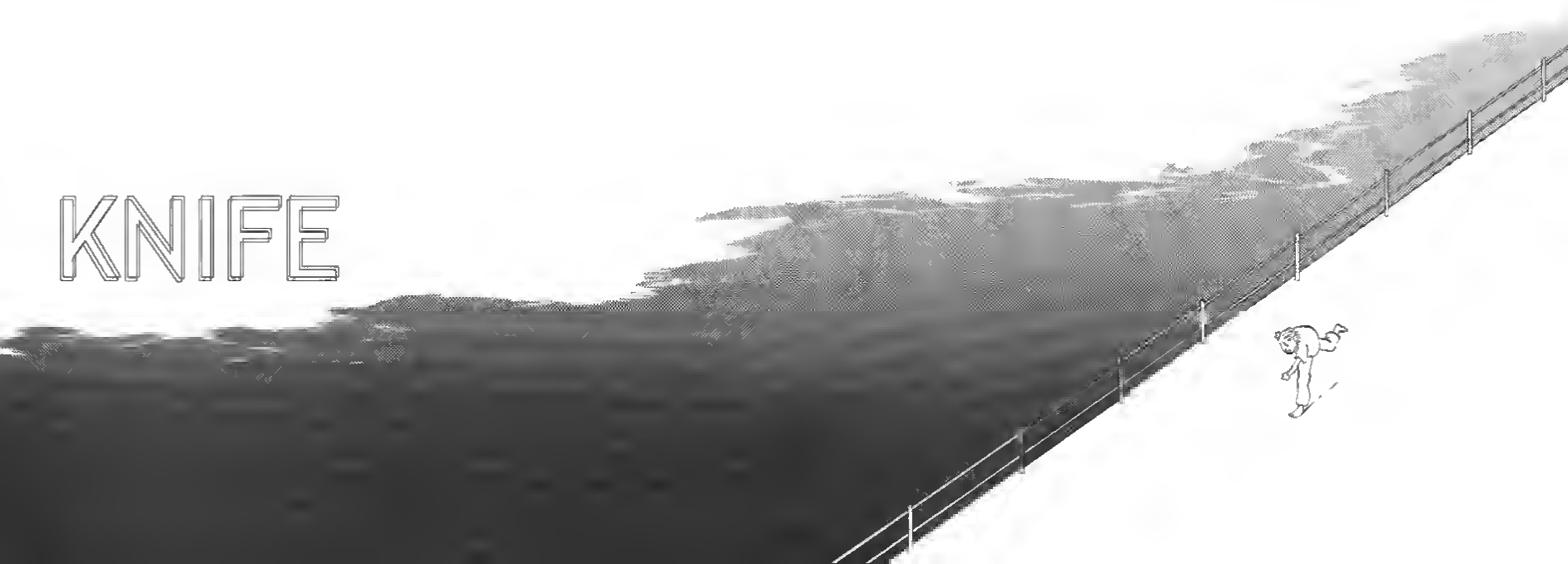
BEAT ME WITH THOSE DIRTY HANDS,

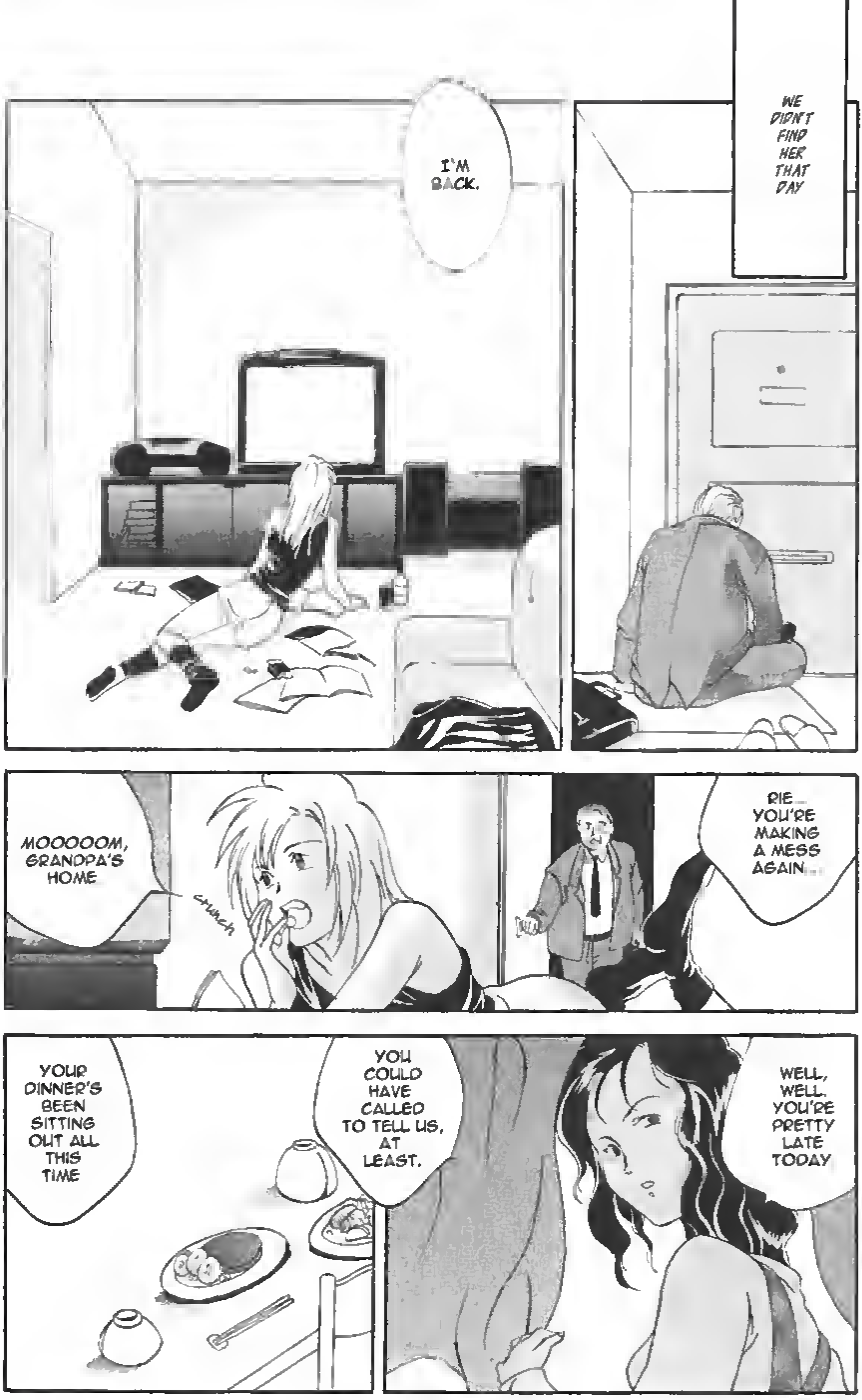
BETRAY ME SO MUCH I FORGET THE PAIN,

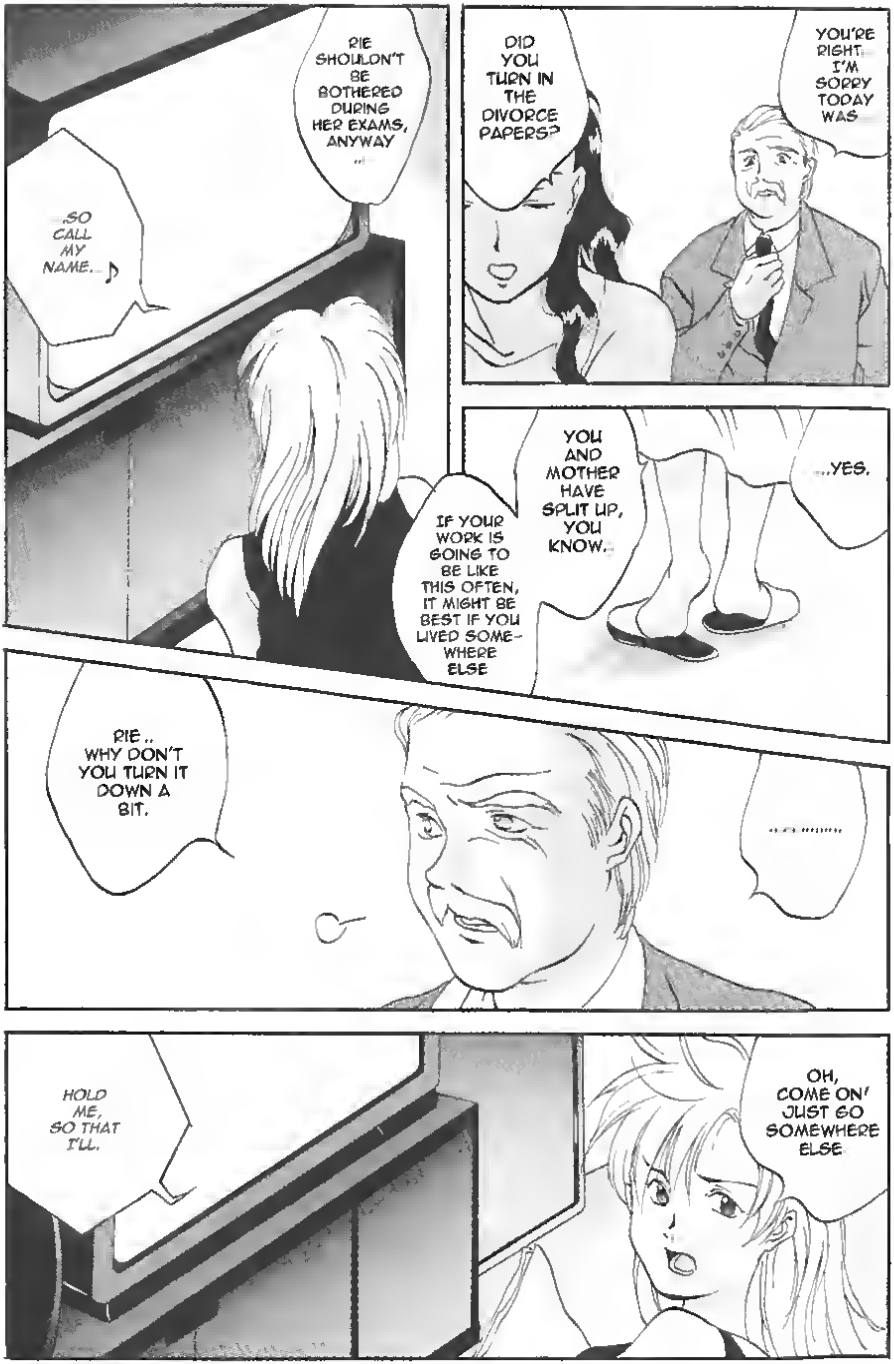
CALL MY NAME UNTIL IT'S GROUND TO POWDER,

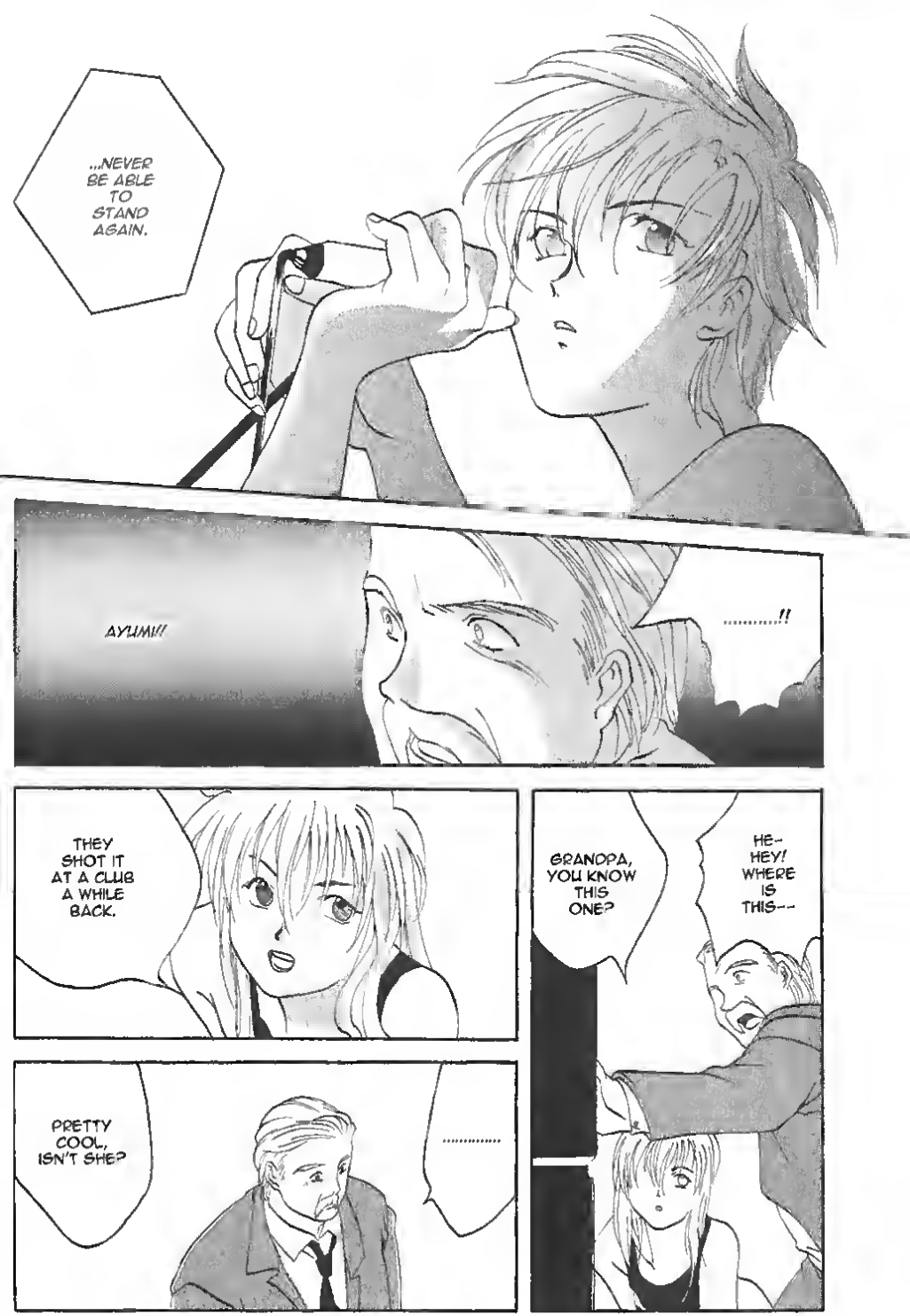
HOLD ME UNTIL I CAN'T STAND UP..

KNIFE




I'M BACK.
WE DIDN'T FIND HER THAT DAY
MOOOOOM, GRANDPA'S HOME
HMMM
RIE... YOU'RE MAKING A MESS AGAIN...
YOUR DINNER'S BEEN SITTING OUT ALL THIS TIME
YOU COULD HAVE CALLED TO TELL US, AT LEAST.
WELL, WELL. YOU'RE PRETTY LATE TODAY


RIE SHOULDN'T BE BOTHERED DURING HER EXAMS, ANYWAY ...
...SO CALL MY NAME...♪
DID YOU TURN IN THE DIVORCE PAPERS?
YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M SORRY TODAY WAS
YOU AND MOTHER HAVE SPLIT UP, YOU KNOW..
IF YOUR WORK IS GOING TO BE LIKE THIS OFTEN, IT MIGHT BE BEST IF YOU LIVED SOMEWHERE ELSE
.....YES.
RIE .. WHY DON'T YOU TURN IT DOWN A BIT.
HOLD ME, SO THAT I'LL.
OH, COME ON! JUST GO SOMEWHERE ELSE


...NEVER BE ABLE TO STAND AGAIN.
AYUMI!!
.....!!
THEY SHOT IT AT A CLUB A WHILE BACK.
PRETTY COOL, ISN'T SHE?
.....
GRANDPA, YOU KNOW THIS ONE?
HE- HEY! WHERE IS THIS--

HAH--!?
WHAT'S THE...THE ADDRESS?

LIVE
JUNGLE

To get a view
Now he's hittin
On you!
Always a queen
Always so fine
Always some joker
Standin' in line

Well let me
hear you sing it
Baby sing the
beautiful
blues!

AND IT'S SO INCREDIBLY LOUD... MY EARS...
SHE'S NOT HERE.. I KNEW SHE WOULDN'T BE..
DRUMER WANTED
IS THIS THE SORT OF PLACE RIE'S ALWAYS AT..?
WHAT WAS THAT!?
WHO'RE YOU CALLING A VIRGIN, FREAK!
FOUND HER--!
FINE THEN, I'LL GIVE YOU A REAL GOOD KISS GIMME YOUR MOUTH.

YO.
A-
AYU...
BEEN A WHILE, HUH, AYUMI.
MY TREAT. DRINK UP.
chunk

GOT OUTTA THERE REAL EARLY, DIDN'T YA.
NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D HAVE THE GUTS TO KILL SOMEONE
C'MON NOW. CONGRATS ON YOUR BREAK-OUT DRINK UP.
I'VE CHANGED MY MIND ABOUT YOU.
HEY NOW, DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK.
GULP!
Ptooie!

WHAT'S WRONG? IT'S ON ME. DRINK UP
WHY YOU--
CLATTER
.....!!
HE... HEY, KIDS, DON'T--
WHO DO YOU THINK MAKES IT SO YOU CAN SING HERE, HUH!?
shove
EH?

CRAAASH
GO ON BACK TO THE BIG HOUSE!
YOU'RE NEVER GONNA SING HERE AGAIN, YA HEAR!?
DON'T YOU GET COCKY!
SOUNDS LIKE YOU.
HAH! WHATEVER. I BET YOU GOT CRAZY AND KILLED HIM 'CUZ HE DUMPED YOU

THUD!
I'LL KILL YOU!
A-- AYUMI--
OOF!
STOP THAT!!
I'LL DO YOU THE SAME AS I DID HIM!
YOU TOO--
What
I'LL KILL YOU!
I'LL KILL YOU!

AYUMI!!
ALL OF YOU...
YOU TOO!
.....
.....
DO YOU RECOGNIZE ME?
.....
YOU'RE..

SUCH EYES. JUST LIKE WOLVES' EYES
OF COURSE.
SO WE'RE GOING BACK THERE?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? IF YOU DON'T COME BACK SOON...
...THINGS WILL GET MUCH TOO NOISY.
WHAT'D YOU COME HERE FOR?
Thud

MY GRAND-DAUGHTER SEEMS TO BE A FAN OF YOURS SHE HAS YOUR VIDEO
AH.. *ahem*
SO, YOU SING, DO YOU?
I'LL HAVE TO CONTACT THE POLICE, TOO.
Click
I'M NOT GOOD WITH LOUD MUSIC, BUT—
THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR SONG—
ALMOST LIKE.

KOUSEI
GH--
STOMP
!!
AYUMI!!

LEMME GO!
JUST CALM DOWN...
I'LL DIE BEFORE I GO BACK THERE!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? THAT'S DANGER-OUS!
DON'T TOUCH ME!
LEMME GO!!
Slap!
...E ... EXCUSE ME...

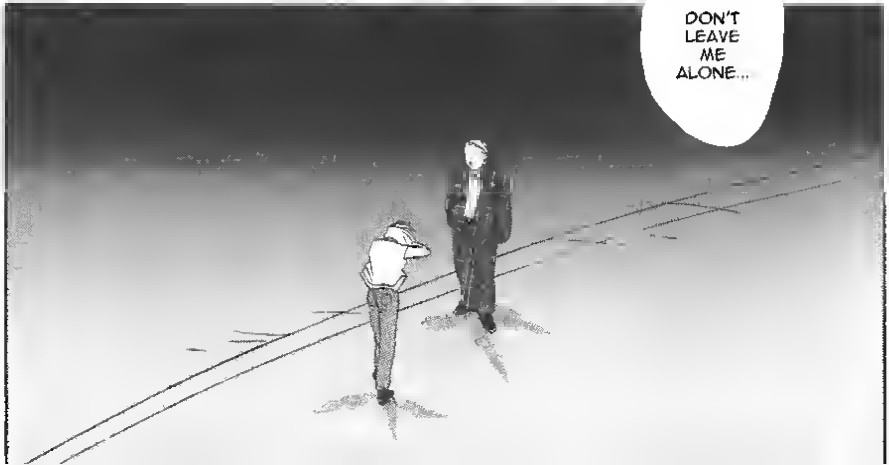
OW.

IT HURTS...

LET ME SEE.
NO!

I CAN'T HAVE HIT HER THAT HARD, CAN I?
ARE... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

PLEASE, SOMEBODY HELP...
ANYBODY ...
.....
..I'M SO SICK OF THIS..


DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE...

...WHAT HAPPENED HERE, I WONDER..
.....
SUCH A SMALL FACE.

SUCH A LITTLE GIRL, AND SHE'S .
HAND-CUFFS DON'T SUIT THEM.
... SMALL HANDS, TOO.
WHY DID THEY LEAVE YOU ALONE...
THAT SHE WAS SO LONELY SHE WANTED TO SCREAM...
WHY DIDN'T ANYBODY REALIZE IT?

I WANT US TO BE ONE, BURNING WITH FEVER
I DON'T WANT US TO SPLIT INTO TWO PEOPLE.
TEACHER ...

LET'S
SINK
TO
THE
BOTTOM
OF
THE
OCEAN
—

SOMEWHERE
SO
DEEP
WE'LL
NEVER
FLOAT
TO
THE
SURFACE
AGAIN
...
LET'S
GO
TOGETHER...

Tap
Tap
I'M WITH THE POLICE..
WE'RE SEARCHING FOR A MISSING GIRL.
IS SOMETHING WRONG, SIR?
OH-- NO.
SIR.. EXCUSE ME, BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS THAT GIRL TO..?
SHE'S ABOUT THE AGE OF THAT ONE
EXCUSE ME? .. SIR?
!

Vroom!
Vrrr

WHY ARE YOU RUNNING?
WHAT'RE YOU DOING THIS FOR!?
JUST KEEP QUIET
HEY, MISTER--
WHY ARE YOU DOING A CRAZY THING LIKE THIS!?
BUT... PLEASE..
JUST HAND ME OVER AND THEY'LL LAY OFF, YOU KNOW!!
DIDJA START FEELING SORRY FOR ME OR SOMETHING?
HEH.. OR WHAT?

I'M LETTING YOU GO.
LET ME HEAR IT STRAIGHT FROM YOU...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT A THING.

THE TWO OF US RAN, SHAKING FREE OF EVERYTHING THAT HAD ENTANGLED US.
A SPEED SO FAST WE ALMOST SOARED INTO THE SKY ...
... AND WE BE-CAME ITS CAP-TIVES.

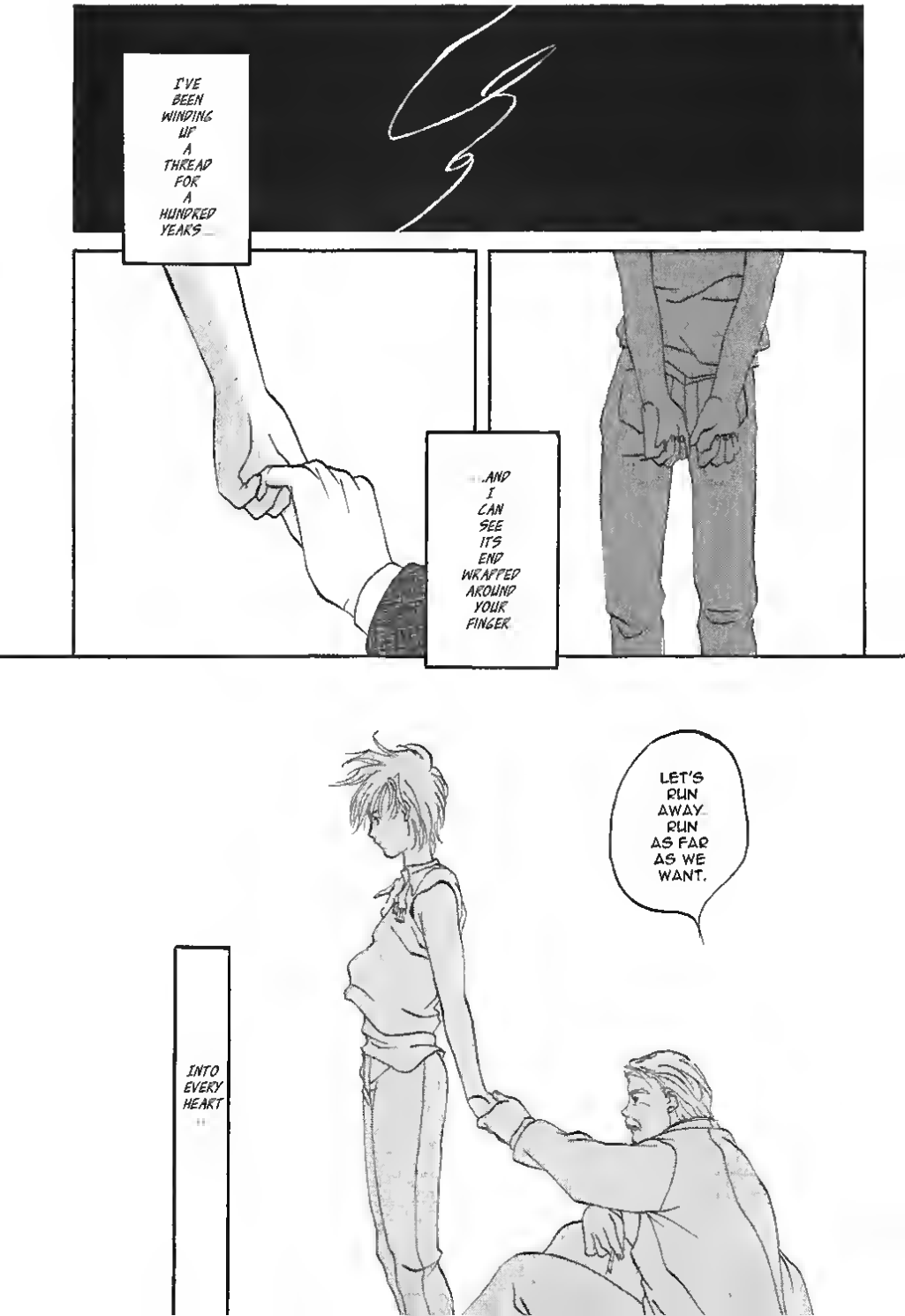
...LOOKS LIKE WE'VE LOST 'EM FOR NOW.
IT'S MORNING.

MY SHOE CAME OFF WHILE I WAS SPEEDING, I JUST KEPT DRIVING, SO IT GOT SCRAPED UP.
OH, THIS...
WHY... DID YOU...
.....
.....

I REALLY DID LIKE MY TEACHER
..I...
.....
BUT EVEN IF I KILLED HIM AND ATE HIM...
HE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN MINE.

BET DEALING WITH PEOPLE'S A PIECE OF CAKE FOR YOU.
NICE TO BE YOU, EH? I MEAN, YOU'RE A PSYCHIA-TRIST.
AND YOU, ONLY SIXTEEN... POOR GIRL...
LOVE AND LONELI-NESS ARE BED-FELLOWS.
IT'S ONLY LOGICAL.
I'VE BEEN DIVORCED TWICE.
WE WERE LONELY, TOO.
GUESS AGAIN.
BET YOU NEVER GET ALL FILTHY LIKE ME.
BUT I'M NOT LONELY NOW.
WHY NOT?
I LIKE YOU, GRAMPS.

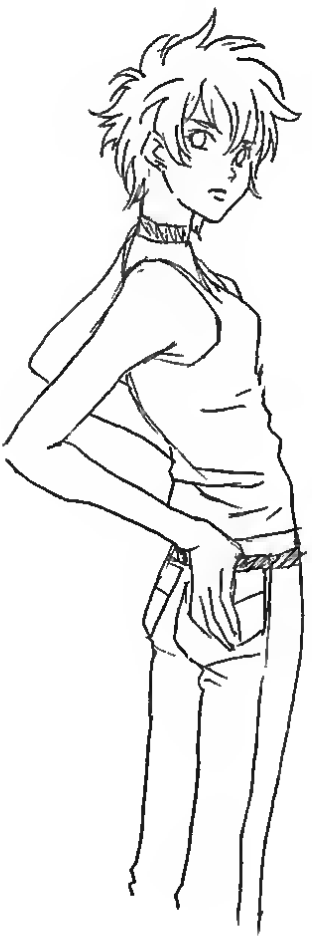
ANALYZE THAT ONE.
...NO IDEA


I'VE BEEN WINDING UP A THREAD FOR A HUNDRED YEARS...
...AND I CAN SEE IT'S END WRAPPED AROUND YOUR FINGER.
LET'S RUN AWAY. RUN AS FAR AS WE WANT.
INTO EVERY HEART

KNIFE.END

Knife. 1994.

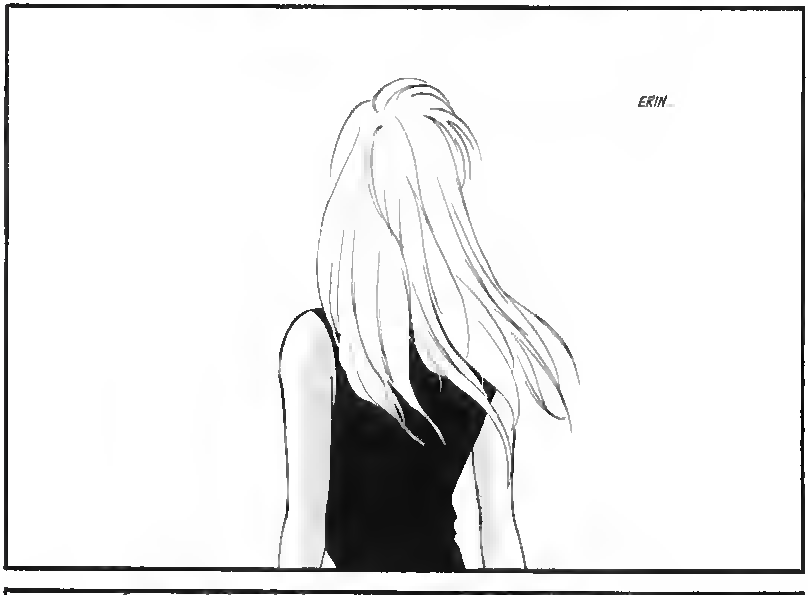
The second one. Enough to make you say, "Hey, c'mon, you're kidding, right?" Drawings like that ...Sheesh. There's a dear smell of the eighties about this one. Except, you know, I drew it in the nineties. I'd entered a manuscript and won a prize which led to my debut, and I didn't even know how the world of manga worked, when I found myself with a story commission, I still didn't really know how to draw manga.



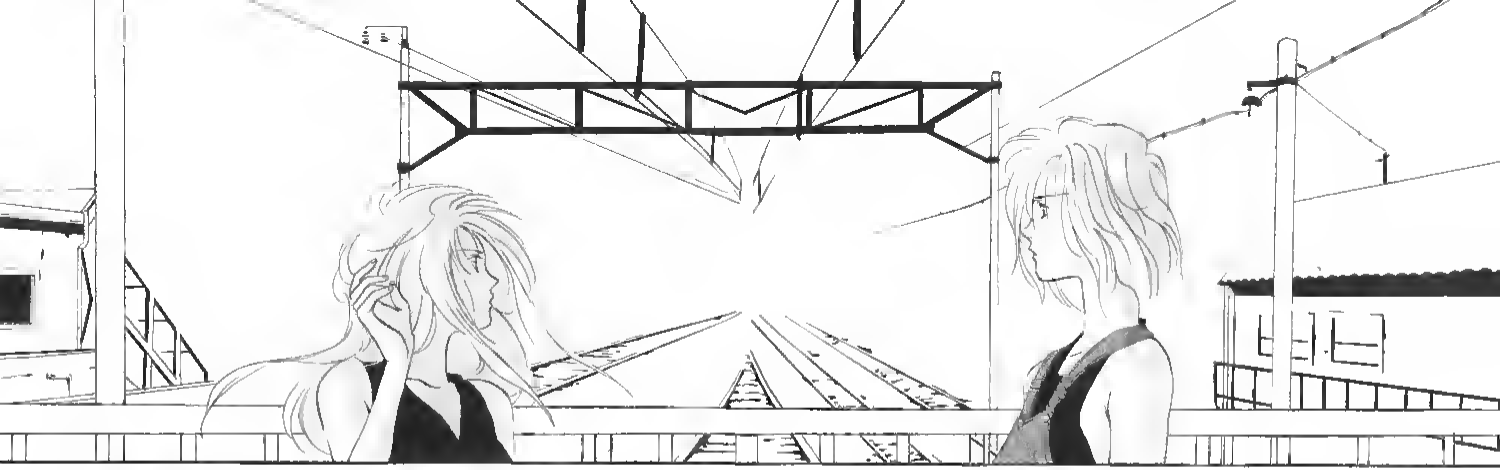
I frantically bought up "How to Draw Manga" books and studied them, I didn't even know how much screentone I'd need for a story. "Five sheets should be enough, right?" Famous last words. Don't know how many times I went running to the manga supply store afterwards.

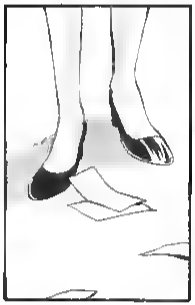
In the winter of her seventeenth year, with lines like "No---The DEADLINE---??" constantly on her lips, Ozaki got a small taste of what it felt like to be a manga artist.

The dub where I hung out at the time was, for some reason, right next to a store that sold Buddhist altars.


ERIN

TURN AROUND, LOOK AT ME

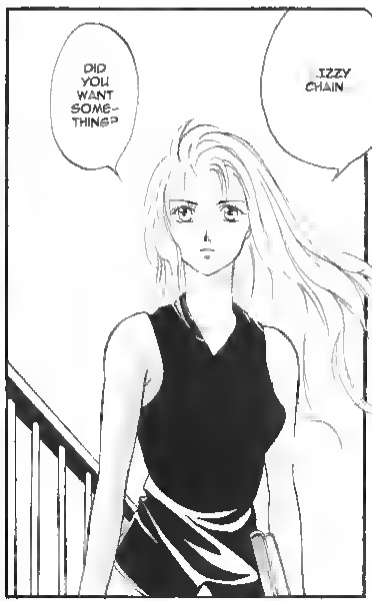




I HEARD YOU WERE EXPENSIVE, BUT I - I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH...
IS THIS ENOUGH?
Wash!

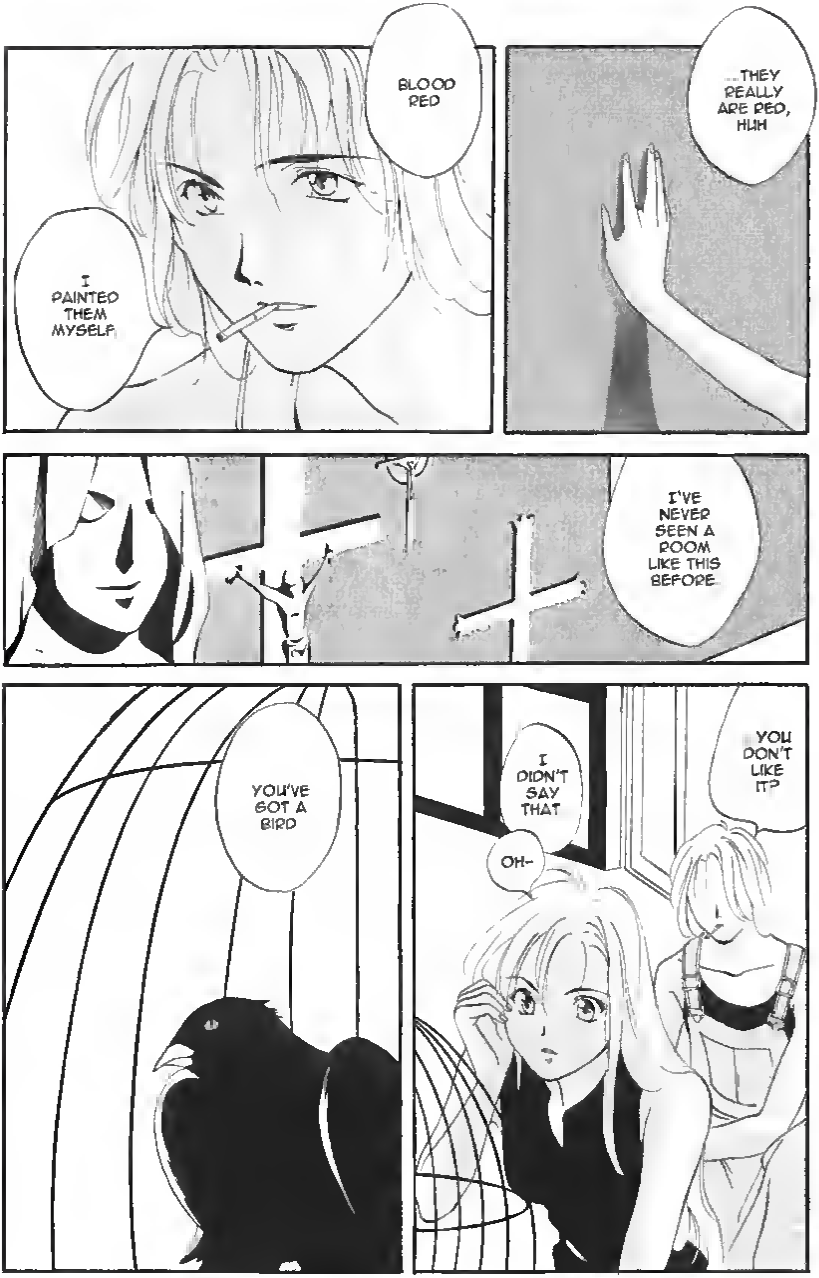
AND I'VE GOT THIRTY-EIGHT STATUES OF CHRIST...
MY-MY ROOM'S REALLY INTERESTING THE WALLS ARE RED...

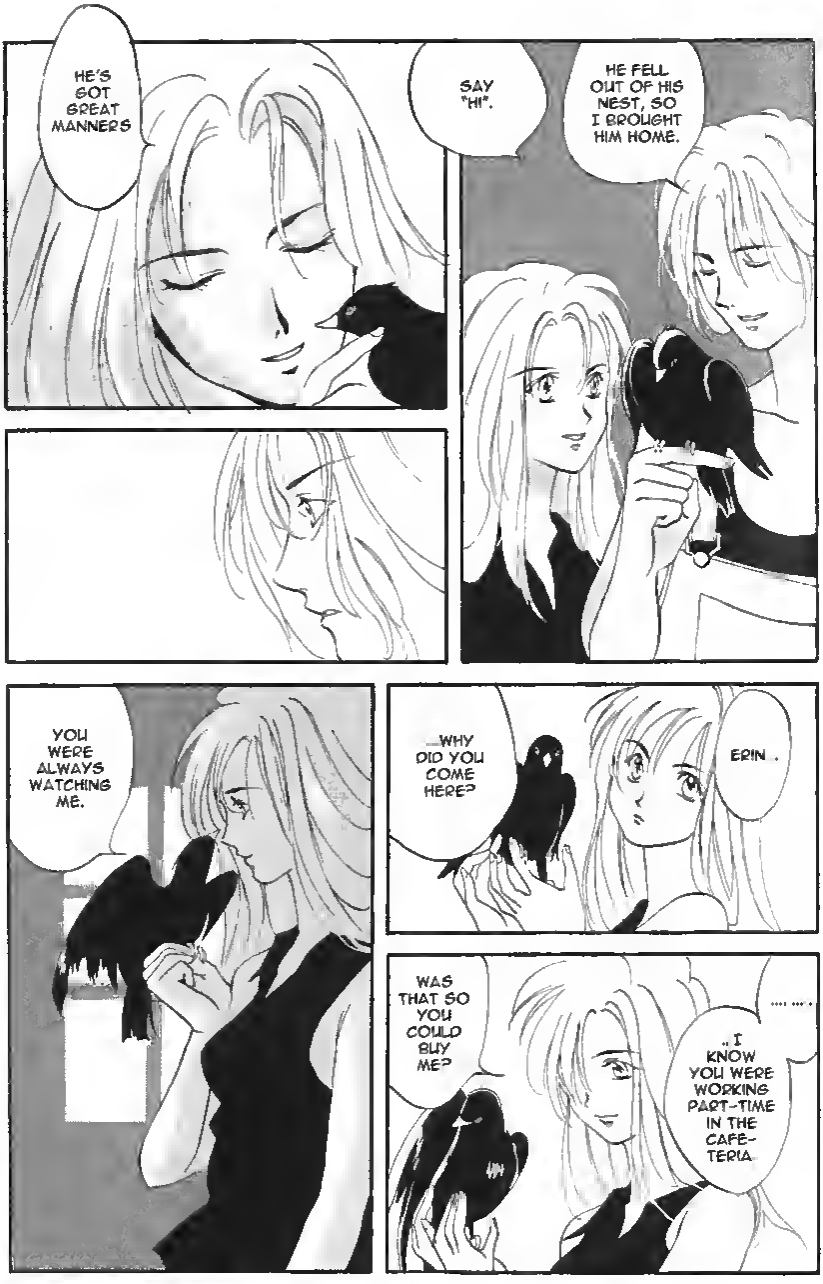
WOULD YOU COME TO MY ROOM?
ERIN... UM TODAY, AFTER SCHOOL. UM


IZZY CHAIN
DID YOU WANT SOME-THING?

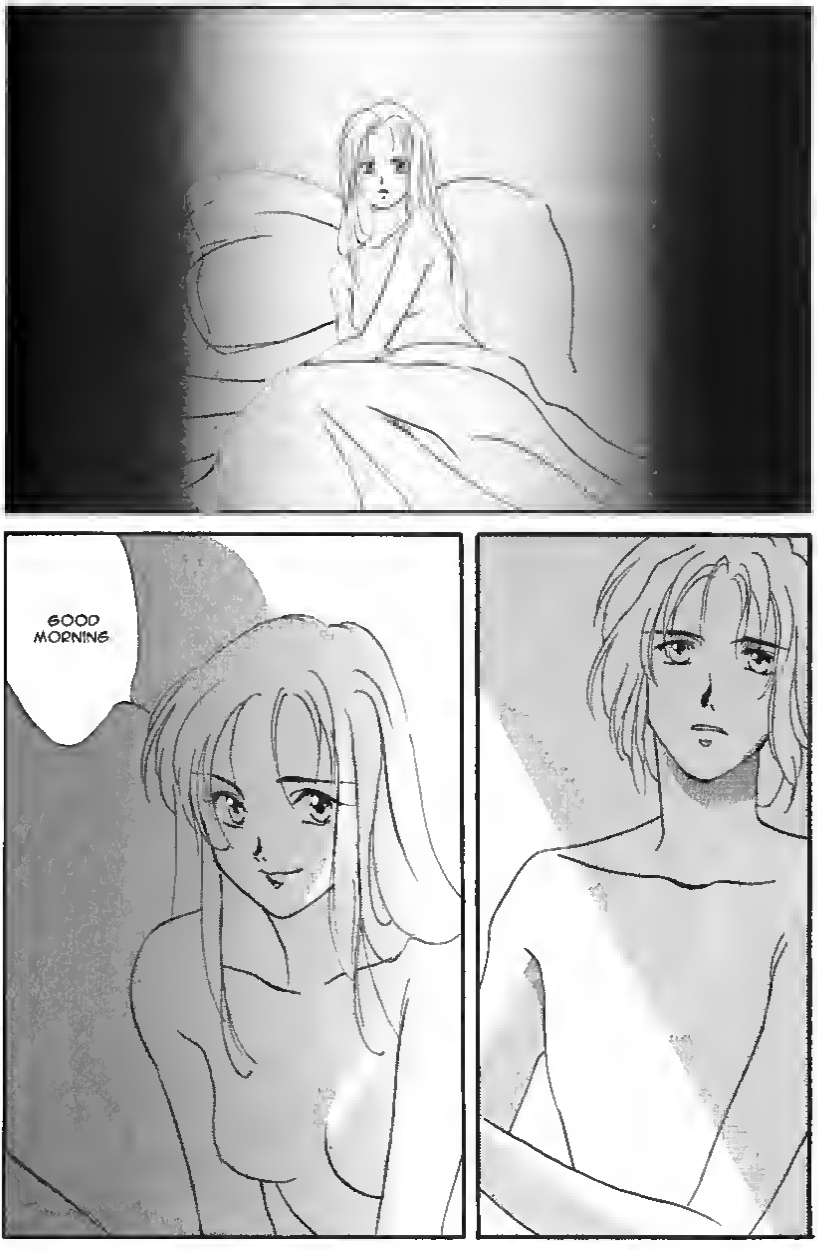
KEITH PAID ME ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS.
NO.
THIS IS FINE.
I'M SORRY. FORGET IT.
TH. THIS ISN'T ANYWHERE NEAR ENOUGH, HUH
rustle
twerk

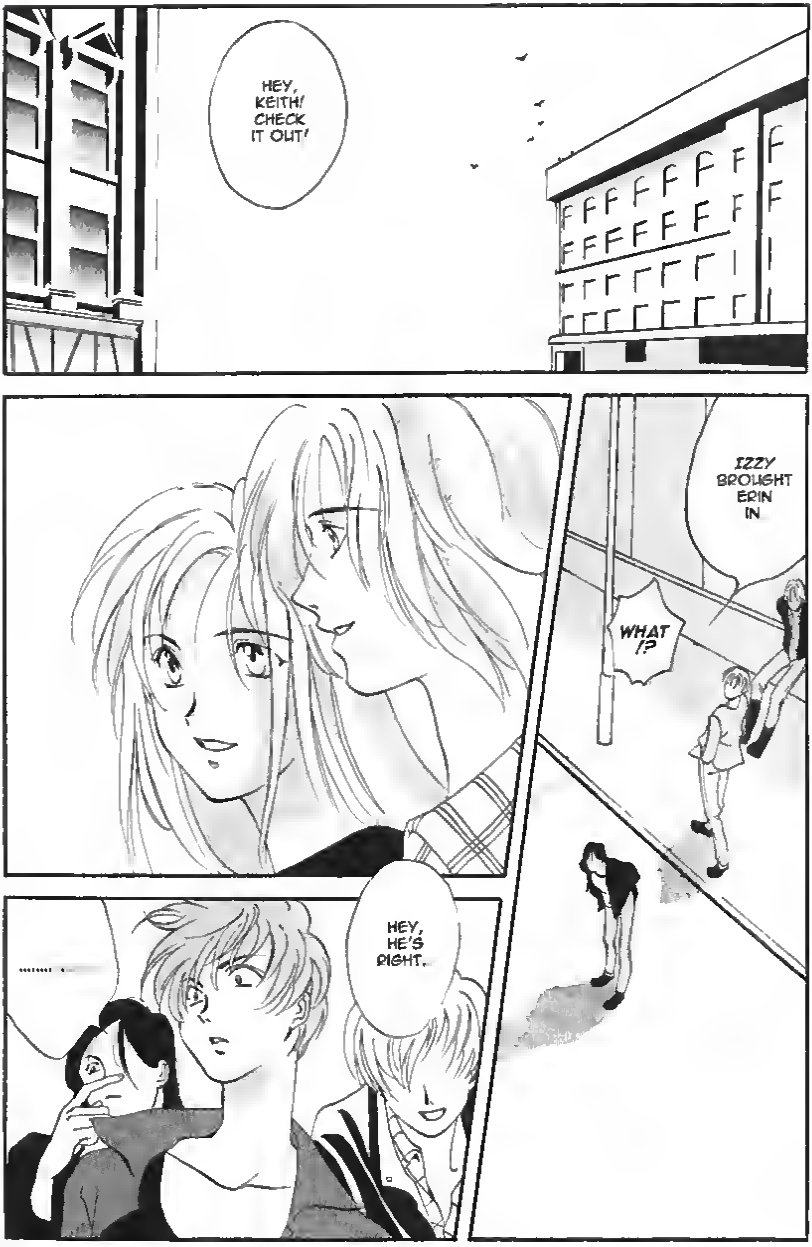
Craving

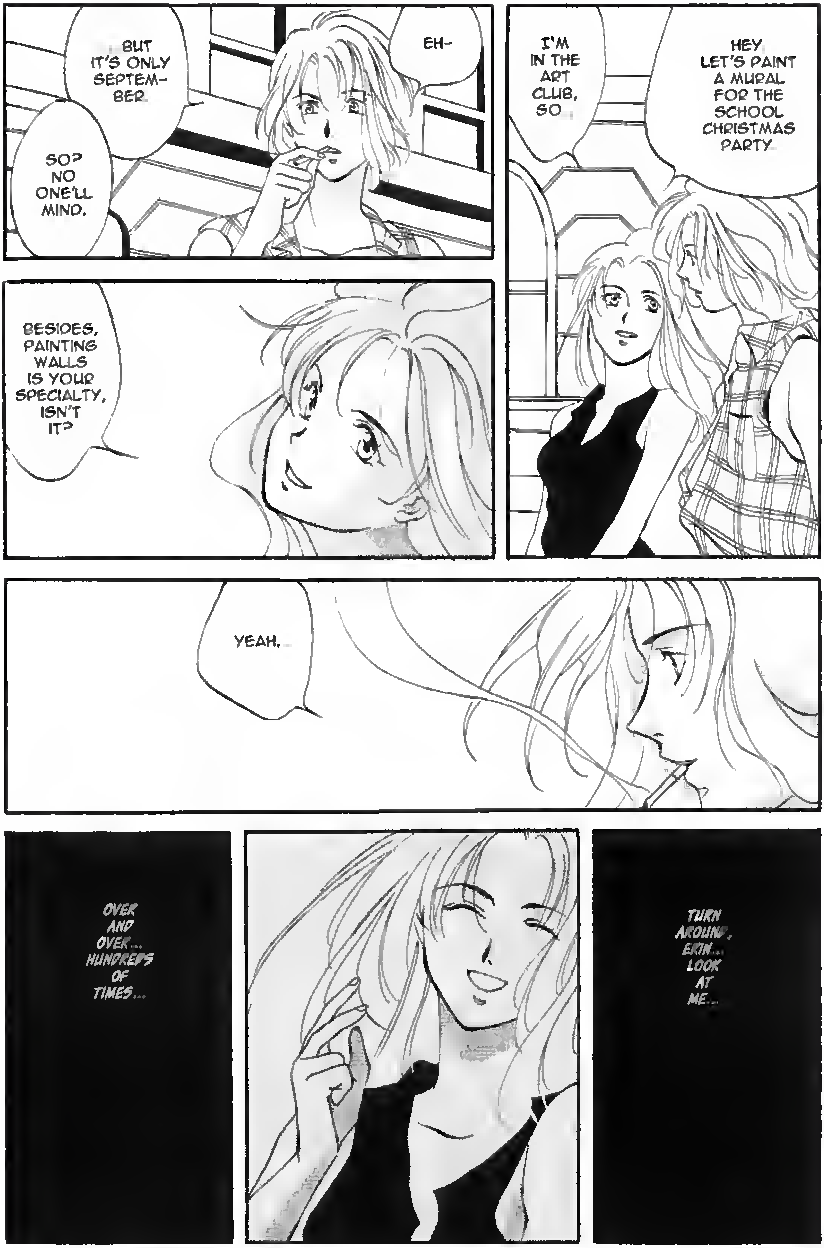

BLOOD RED
I PAINTED THEM MYSELF
...THEY REALLY ARE RED, HUH
I'VE NEVER SEEN A ROOM LIKE THIS BEFORE
YOU'VE GOT A BIRD
I DIDN'T SAY THAT
OH-
YOU DON'T LIKE IT?

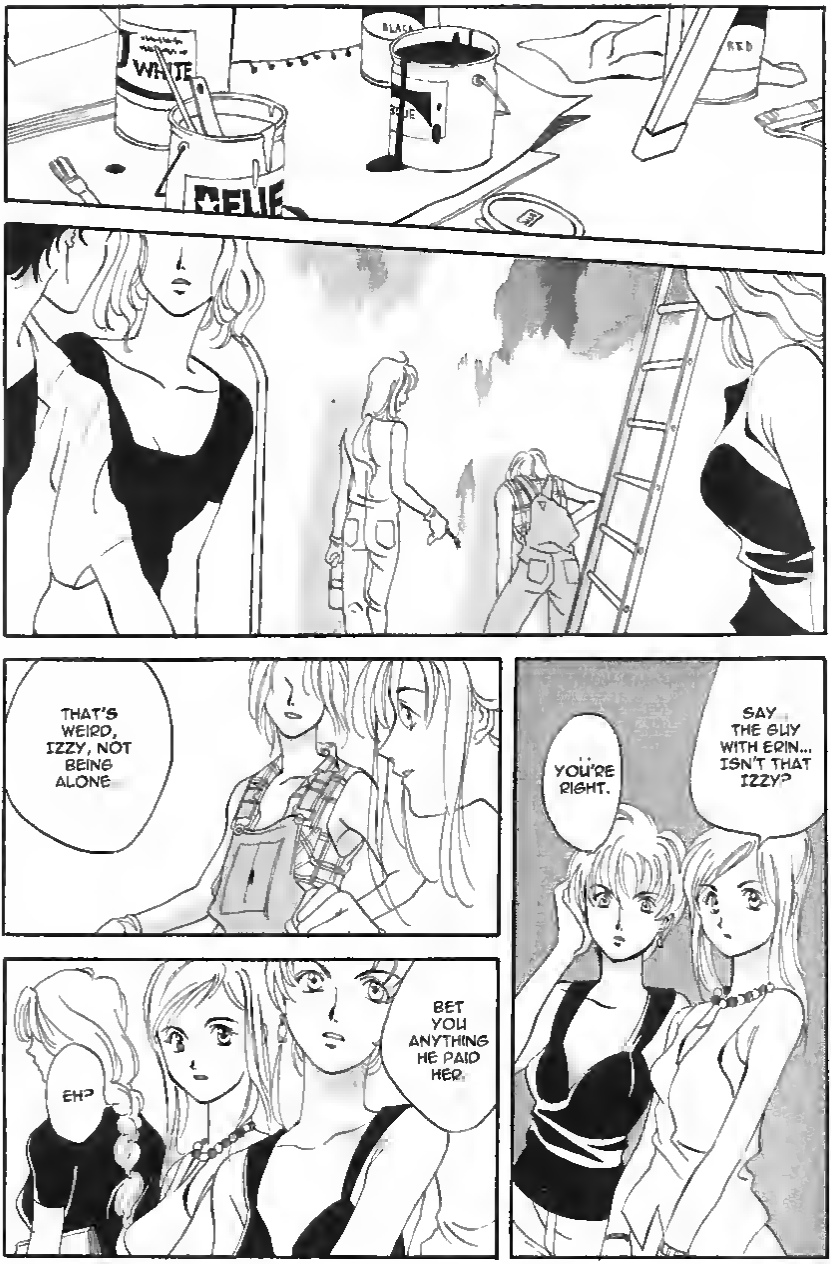

HE'S GOT GREAT MANNERS
SAY "HI".
HE FELL OUT OF HIS NEST, SO I BROUGHT HIM HOME.
YOU WERE ALWAYS WATCHING ME.
...WHY DID YOU COME HERE?
ERIN.
WAS THAT SO YOU COULD BUY ME?
.. I KNOW YOU WERE WORKING PART-TIME IN THE CAFE-TERIA.
.....

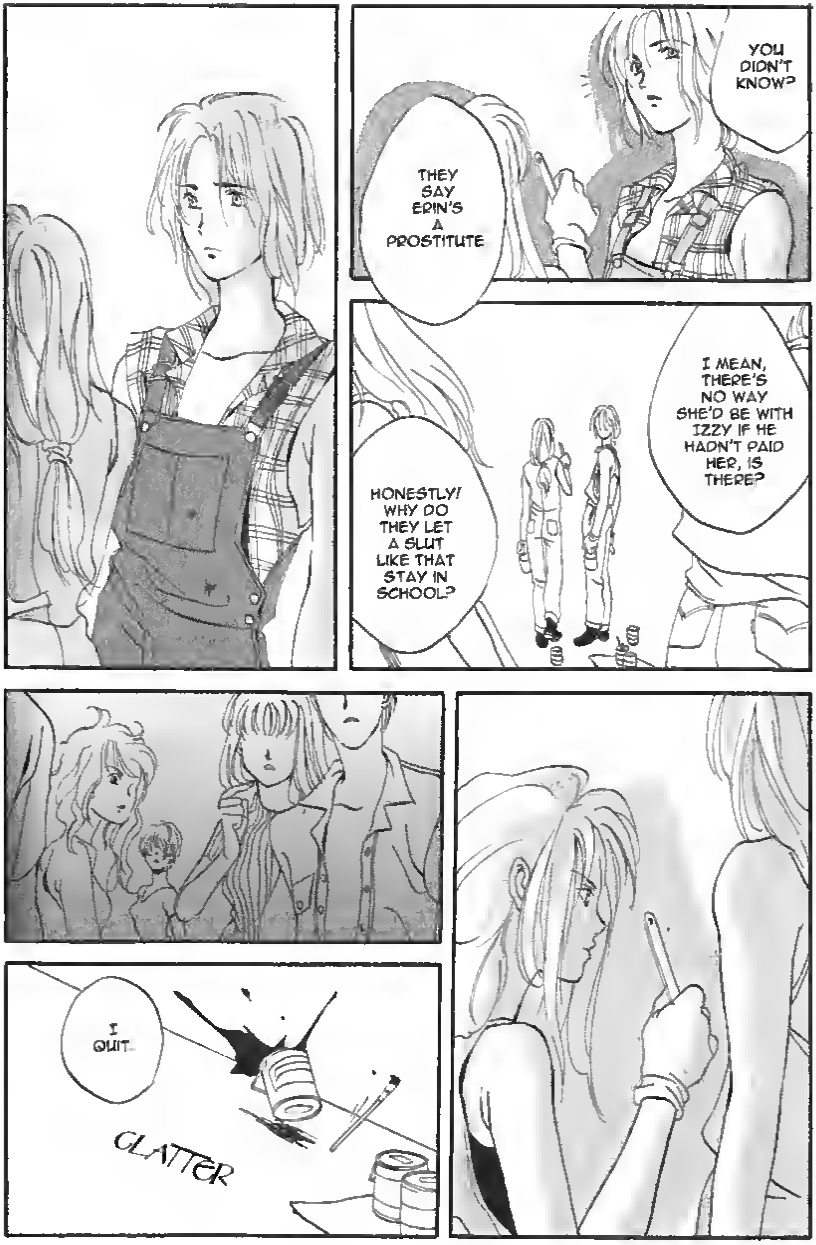
C'MERE AND LET ME SEE IT.
YOU KNOW WHAT? YOU'VE GOT A REALLY PRETTY FACE.


GOOD MORNING

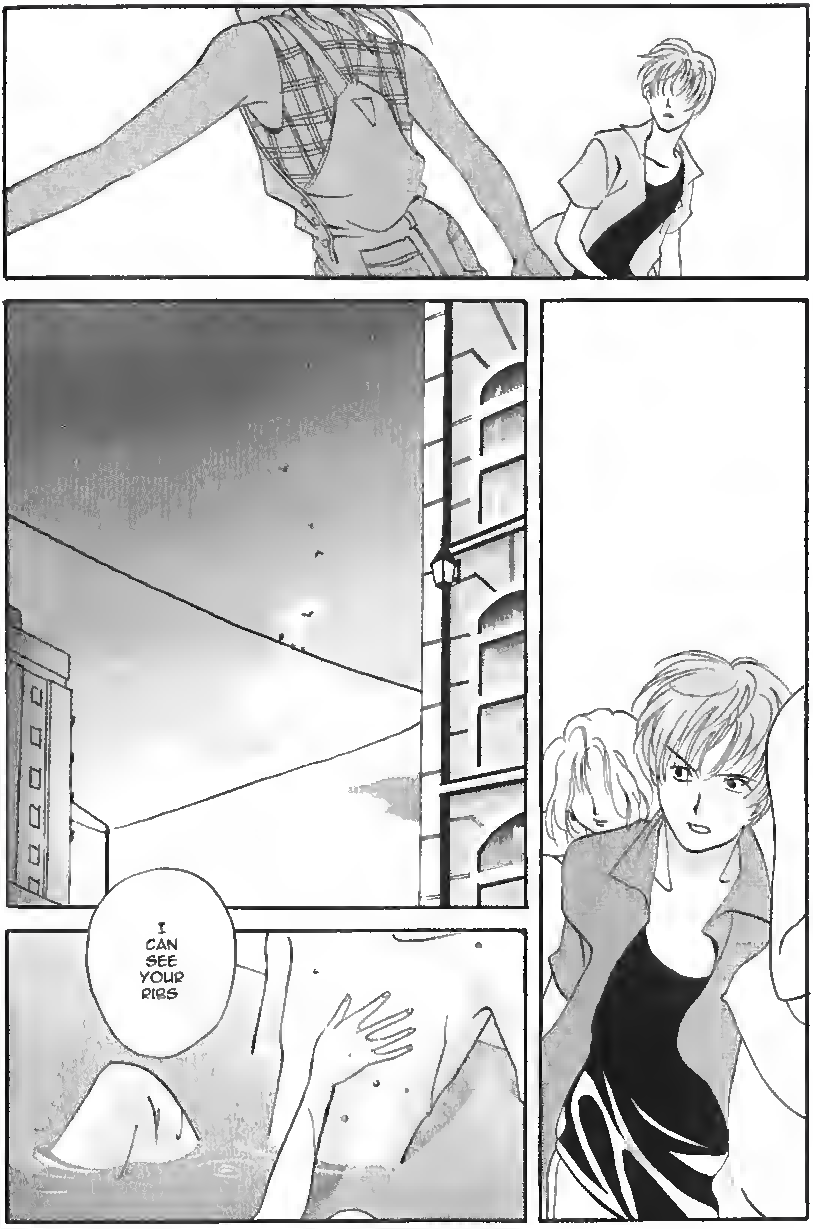

HEY, KEITH! CHECK IT OUT!
IZZY BROUGHT ERIN IN
WHAT!?
HEY, HE'S RIGHT.
.....

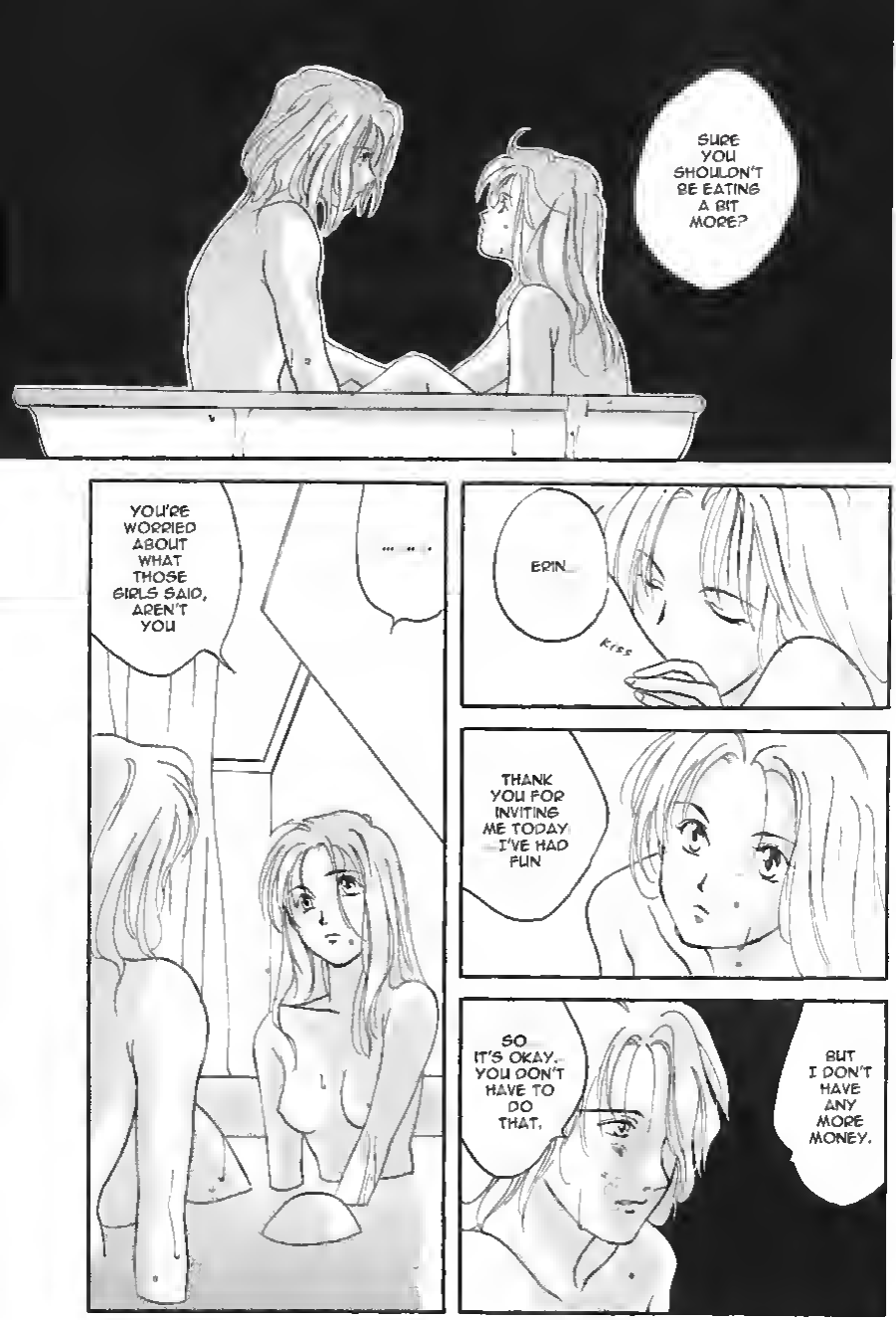

EH-
BUT IT'S ONLY SEPTEMBER.
SO? NO ONE'LL MIND.
HEY LET'S PAINT A MURAL FOR THE SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PARTY.
I'M IN THE ART CLUB, SO...
BESIDES, PAINTING WALLS IS YOUR SPECIALTY, ISN'T IT?
YEAH.
OVER AND OVER... HUNDREDS OF TIMES...
TURN AROUND, ERIN... LOOK AT ME...


BLACK
RED
THAT'S WEIRD, IZZY, NOT BEING ALONE
SAY... THE GUY WITH ERIN... ISN'T THAT IZZY?
...YOU'RE RIGHT.
BET YOU ANYTHING HE PAID HER.
EH?


YOU DIDN'T KNOW?
THEY SAY ERIN'S A PROSTITUTE
I MEAN, THERE'S NO WAY SHE'D BE WITH IZZY IF HE HADN'T PAID HER, IS THERE?
HONESTLY! WHY DO THEY LET A SLUT LIKE THAT STAY IN SCHOOL?
I QUIT.
CLATTER

LET'S GO TAKE A BATH, SHALL WE?
ERIN--
EH?
WHAT?
HURRY UP.
A BATH. YOU KNOW. "BATH".
LET'S HURRY UP AND GO HOME.


I CAN SEE YOUR RIBS


SURE YOU SHOULDN'T BE EATING A BIT MORE?
YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT WHAT THOSE GIRLS SAID, AREN'T YOU
... .. .
ERIN...
KISS
THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME TODAY. I'VE HAD FUN
SO IT'S OKAY. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT.
BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY MORE MONEY.

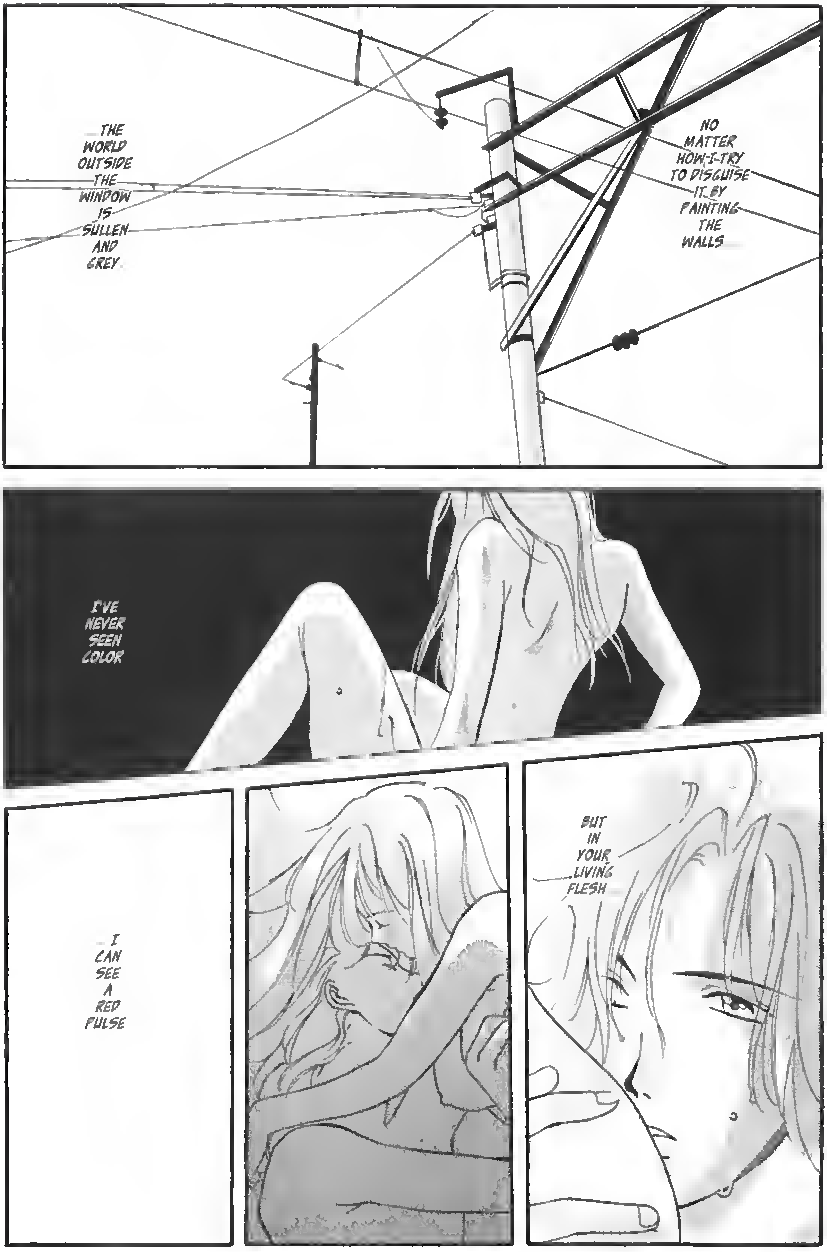
WHY NOT?
ARE YOU AFRAID OF ME? DO YOU HATE ME?
I CAN'T.

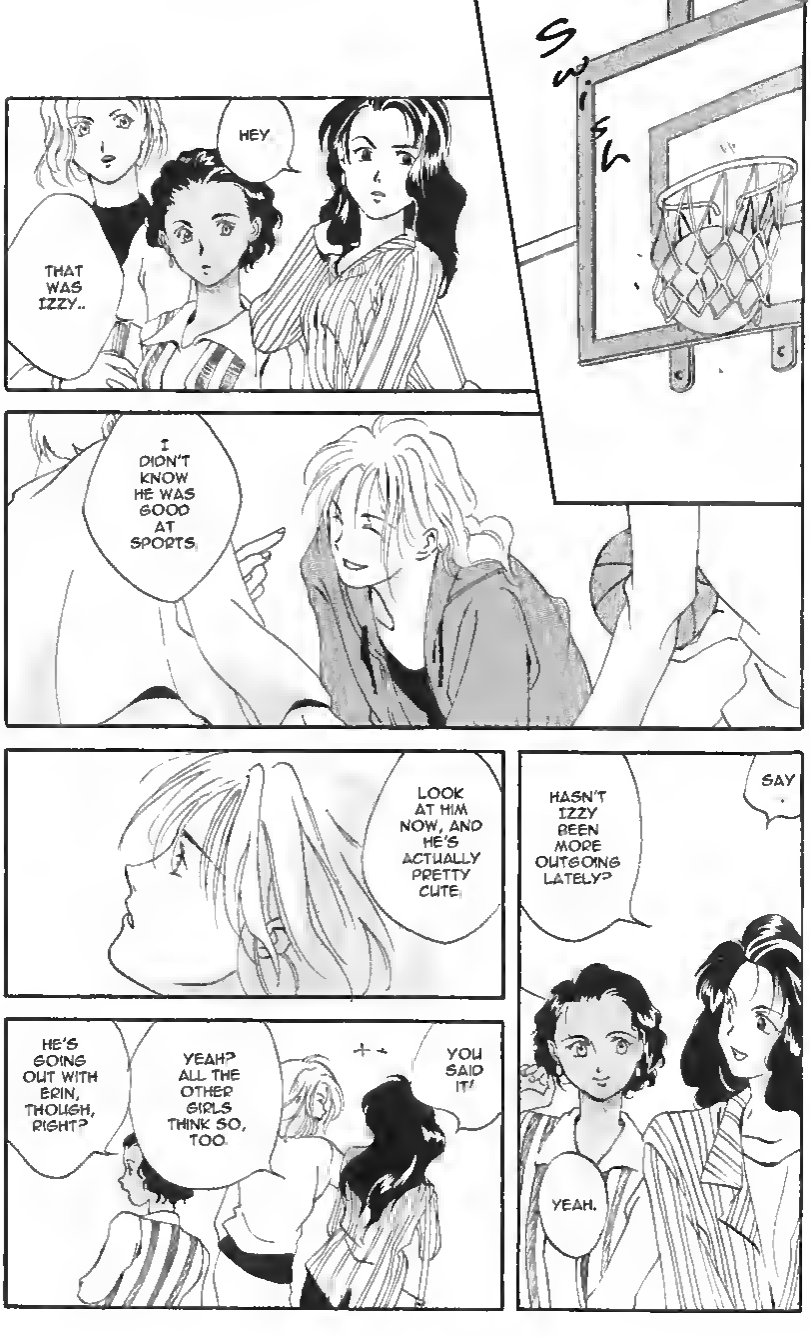
THIS ISN'T LIKE THAT.
.. I DON'T NEED MONEY ANY MORE

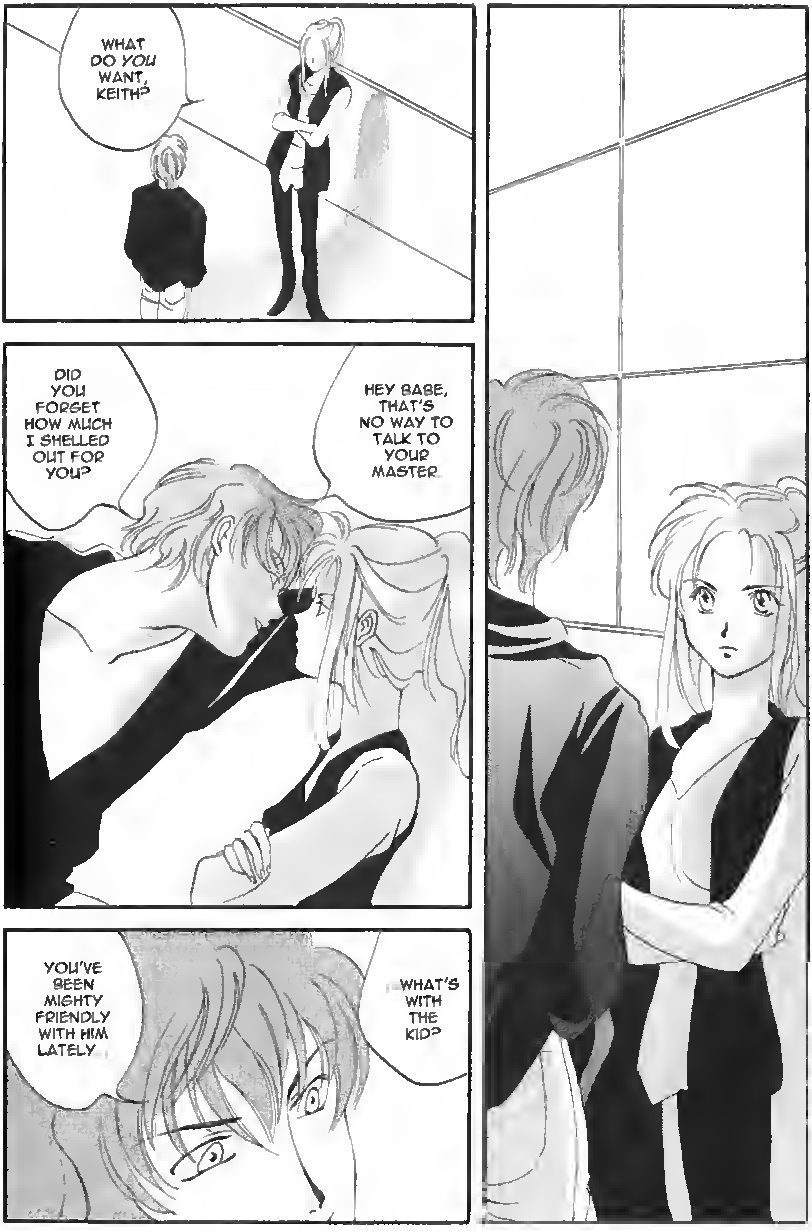
I'VE GOT ONE SHAMEFUL WISH, WHICH WILL LAST AS LONG AS I'M ALIVE...
I WANT TO BE LOVED

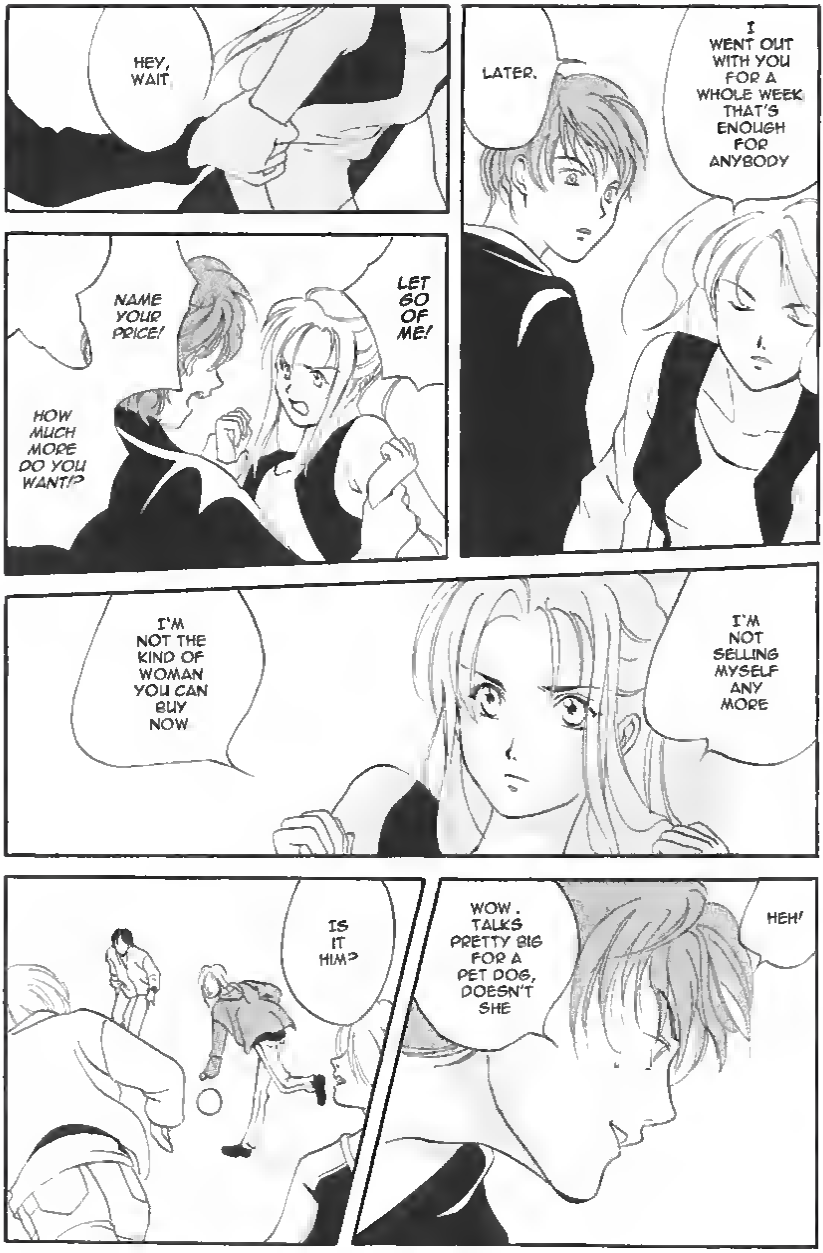
IZZY.
LOOK ME IN THE EYE WHEN YOU TALK TO ME.

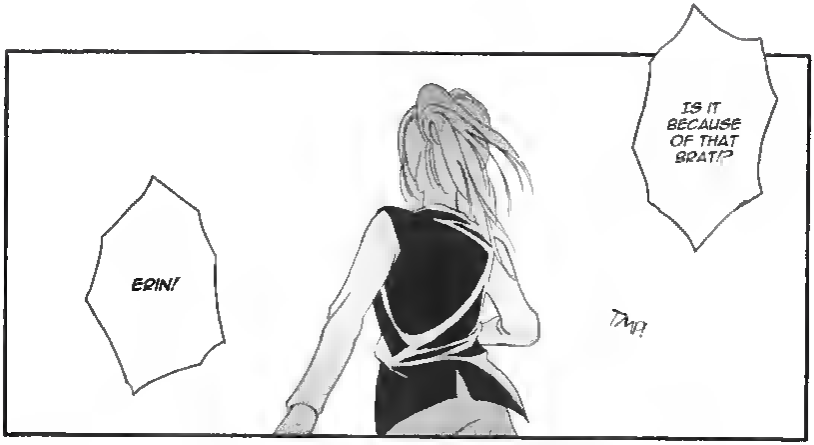
YOU CAN HAVE ME. JUST TAKE ME.
TO FULFILL THAT WISH...
...I NEED YOUR HANDS.
HOLD ON TIGHT.
...BE BRAVE.

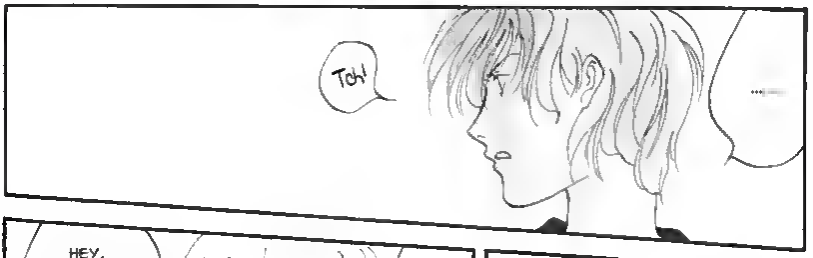

THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE WINDOW IS SULLEN AND GREY
NO MATTER HOW I TRY TO DISGUISE IT BY PAINTING THE WALLS
I'VE NEVER SEEN COLOR
I CAN SEE A RED PULSE
BUT IN YOUR LIVING FLESH

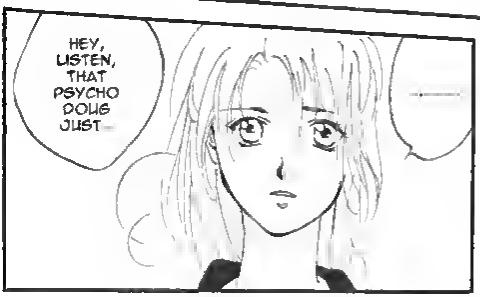

HEY
THAT WAS IZZY..
SWISH
I DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS GOOD AT SPORTS.
LOOK AT HIM NOW, AND HE'S ACTUALLY PRETTY CUTE.
HASN'T IZZY BEEN MORE OUTGOING LATELY?
SAY
YEAH.
HE'S GOING OUT WITH ERIN, THOUGH, RIGHT?
YEAH? ALL THE OTHER GIRLS THINK SO, TOO.
YOU SAID IT!


WHAT DO *YOU* WANT, KEITH?
DID YOU FORGET HOW MUCH I SHELLED OUT FOR YOU?
HEY BABE, THAT'S NO WAY TO TALK TO YOUR MASTER.
YOU'VE BEEN MIGHTY FRIENDLY WITH HIM LATELY.
WHAT'S WITH THE KID?


HEY, WAIT
LATER.
I WENT OUT WITH YOU FOR A WHOLE WEEK. THAT'S ENOUGH FOR ANYBODY
LET GO OF ME!
NAME YOUR PRICE!
HOW MUCH MORE DO YOU WANT!?
I'M NOT THE KIND OF WOMAN YOU CAN BUY NOW
I'M NOT SELLING MYSELF ANY MORE
IS IT HIM?
WOW. TALKS PRETTY BIG FOR A PET DOG, DOESN'T SHE
HEH!


IS IT BECAUSE OF THAT BRAT!?
ERIN!
Thp!


Tch!
...


HEY, LISTEN, THAT PSYCHO DOUG JUST...

ERIN.

...HUH?
WHAT'S WRONG?

NOTHING AT ALL.
NOTHING
'KAY.
..LET'S WORK ON THE MURAL.

HOW LONG I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR YOU
I CAN'T EVEN SAY HOW LONG I WAS ALONE
SUGAR

WHAT'S WRONG, IZZY?
C'MON, LET'S GO.

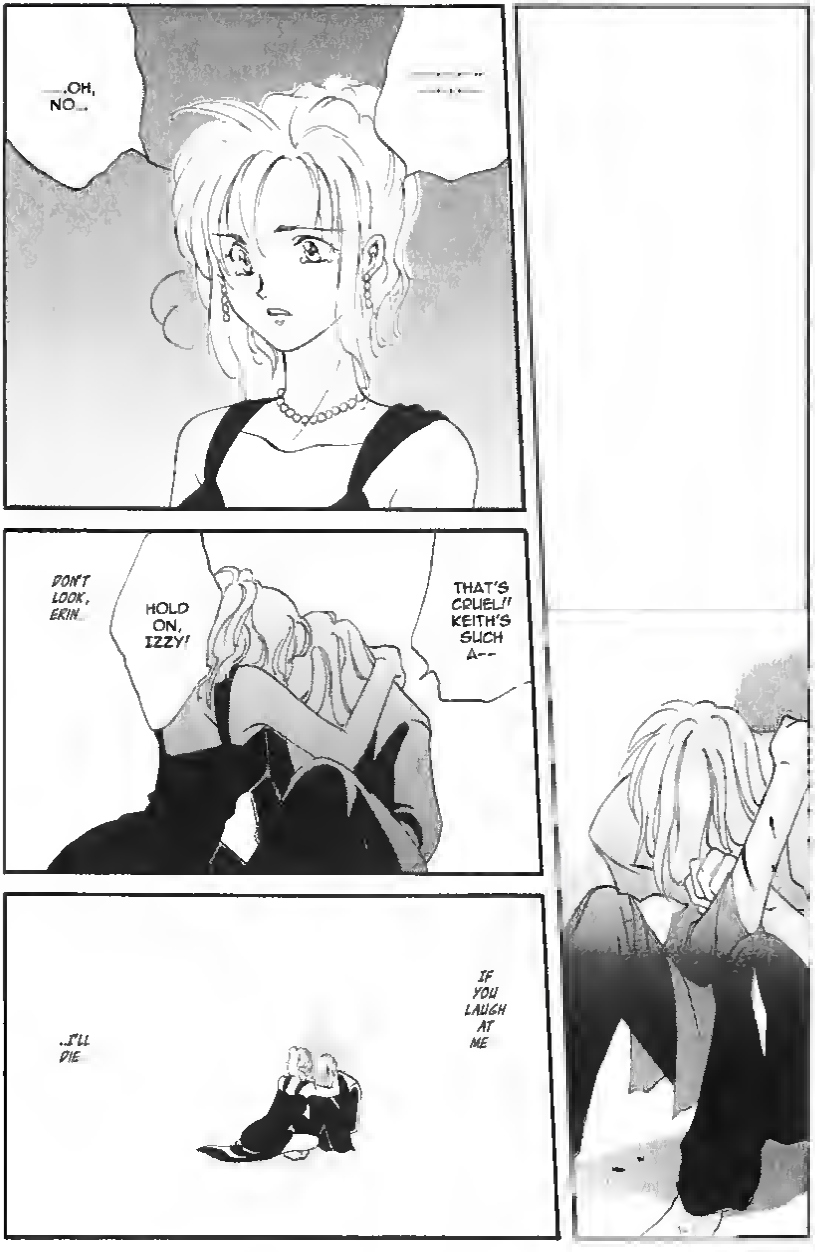
EVERY-ONE'S ALL PRETTY.
WELL, YEAH
I...I'VE NEVER GONE TO A PARTY BEFORE
I PROBABLY LOOK LIKE A DORK.
YOU LOOK TERRIFIC.
IF YOU LAUGH AT ME, I'LL DIE.

UM...
I'M ALREADY, KINDA...
dance
ERIN.
WOULD YOU DANCE WITH ME?
GO AHEAD.
I'LL WATCH.
OKAY.

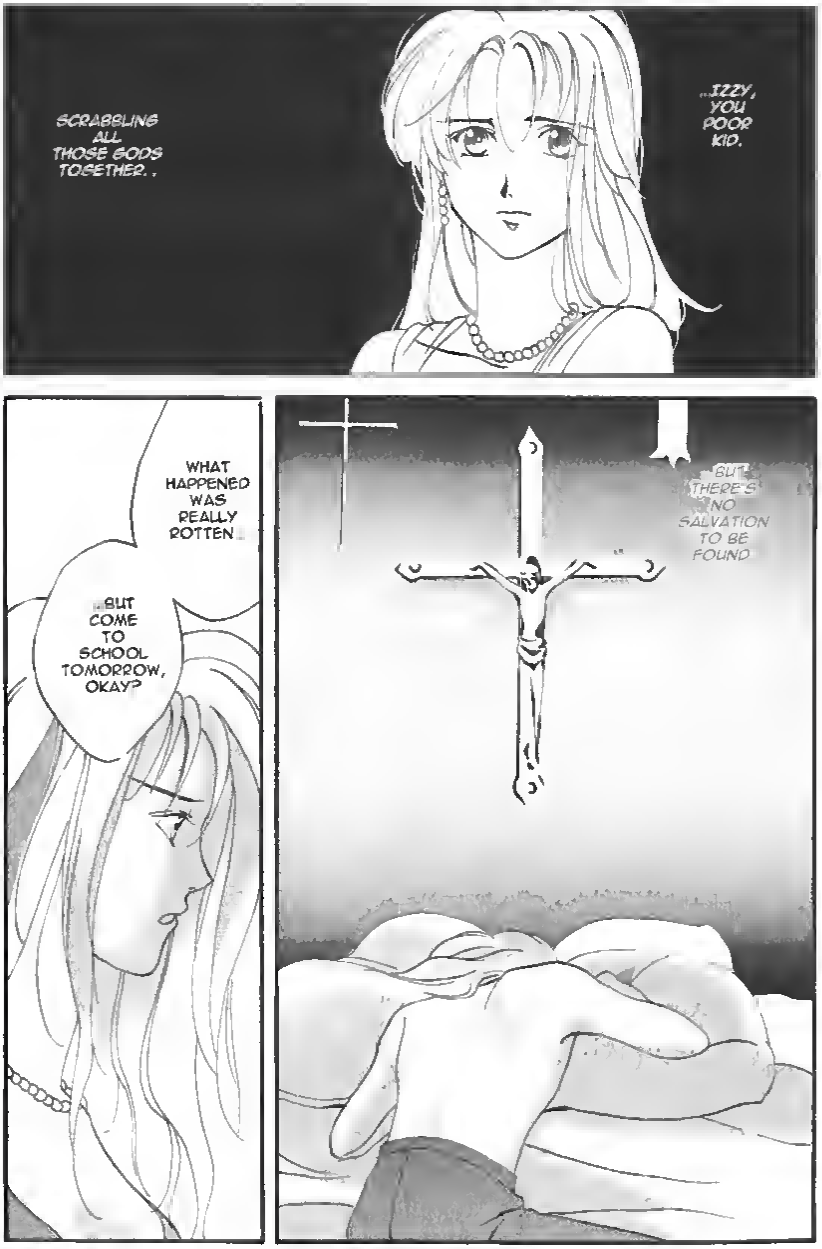
HI, IZZY.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE YOU'RE MY CLASS-MATES.
YOU GUYS ARE PRETTY, TOO.
GOOD EVENING.
HE-HEYA
What...
YOU LOOK GREAT.
WE NEED TO TALK.
IT'S TOO BRIGHT.
I CAN'T HEAR.
IZZY.
DANCE WITH ME LATER, IZZY?
NOOOO! ME FIRST, ME FIRST!
WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

HOW MUCH?
COME QUICK!!
ERIN!
ERIN!
!!
KEITH CAME AND TOOK IZZY OFF SOMEWHERE!
HOW MUCH...
...DID YOU PAY FOR HER?
Slash
DON'T MESS WITH ME, PUNK!
. SHE DIDN'T WANT MONEY..
ERIN SAID...

THINK I'M GONNA LET SOME PASTY NOBODY LIKE YOU--
I BOUGHT ERIN. SHE'S MINE.
--TAKE HER AWAY FROM ME!?
IZZY--!!


...OH, NO...
DON'T LOOK, ERIN...
HOLD ON, IZZY!
THAT'S CRUEL!! KEITH'S SUCH A--
...I'LL DIE...
IF YOU LAUGH AT ME

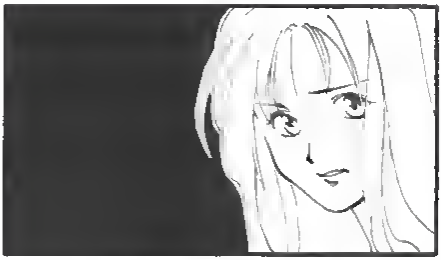
IZZY...
YOU'LL GET THE SHEETS DIRTY
..CLEAN OFF THE BLOOD...
MY PUNISHMENT FOR GOING SOMEWHERE THAT BRIGHT
PUNISHMENT FOR HAVING YOU TOUCH ME
...IT WAS PUNISHMENT...

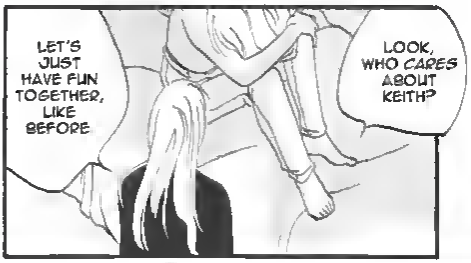

SCRABBLING ALL THOSE GODS TOGETHER..
..IZZY, YOU POOR KID.
WHAT HAPPENED WAS REALLY ROTTEN..
..BUT COME TO SCHOOL TOMORROW, OKAY?
..BUT THERE'S NO SALVATION TO BE FOUND

P.TUNK

YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TO SCHOOL ONCE SINCE THEN, HAVE YOU.
YOU WON'T EVEN TALK TO ME
DRUGGING YOURSELF NUMB, MORNING TO NIGHT
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO?

IZZY.




LET'S JUST HAVE FUN TOGETHER, LIKE BEFORE
LOOK, WHO CARES ABOUT KEITH?

KEITH'S BABY?

I, I'M PREGNANT.

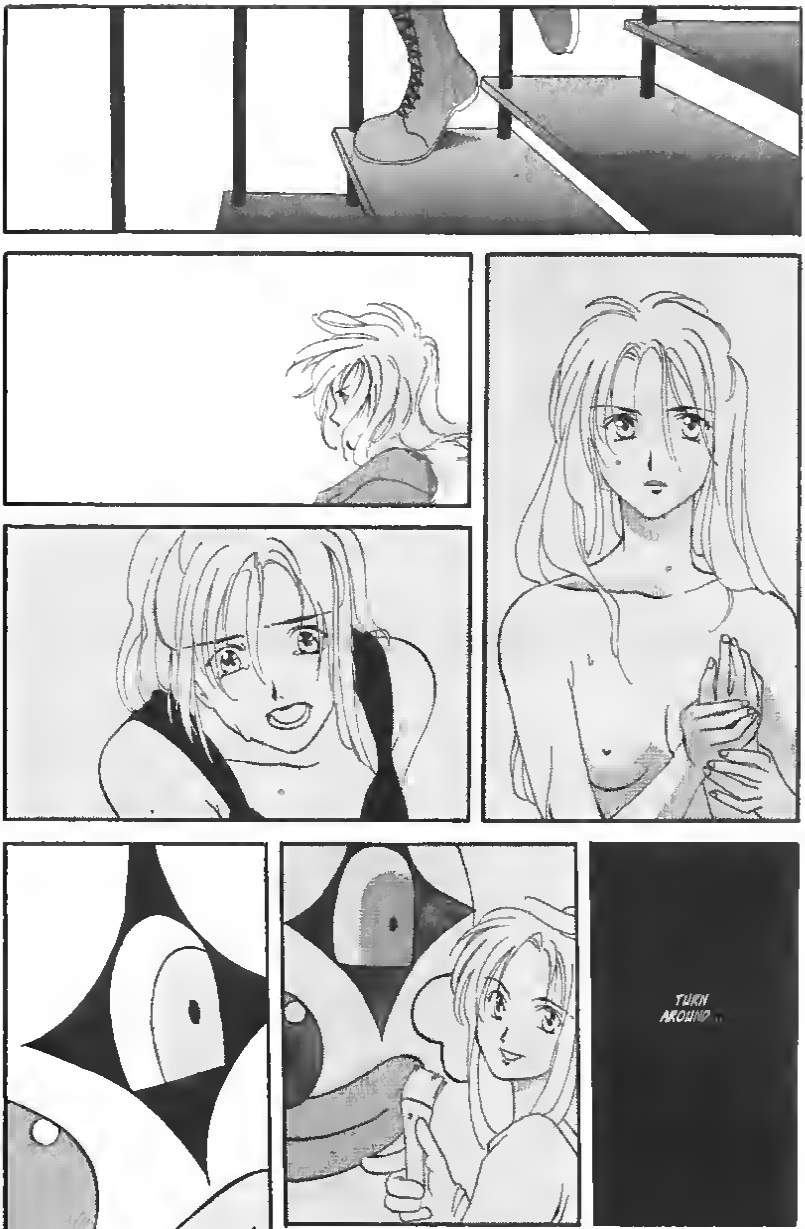
--HOW COULD YOU EVEN THINK SUCH A--!?
LET'S GO TO THE ROOF
clink
IT'S YOURS
I SHOULD LET HIM SUNBATHE
IZZY--

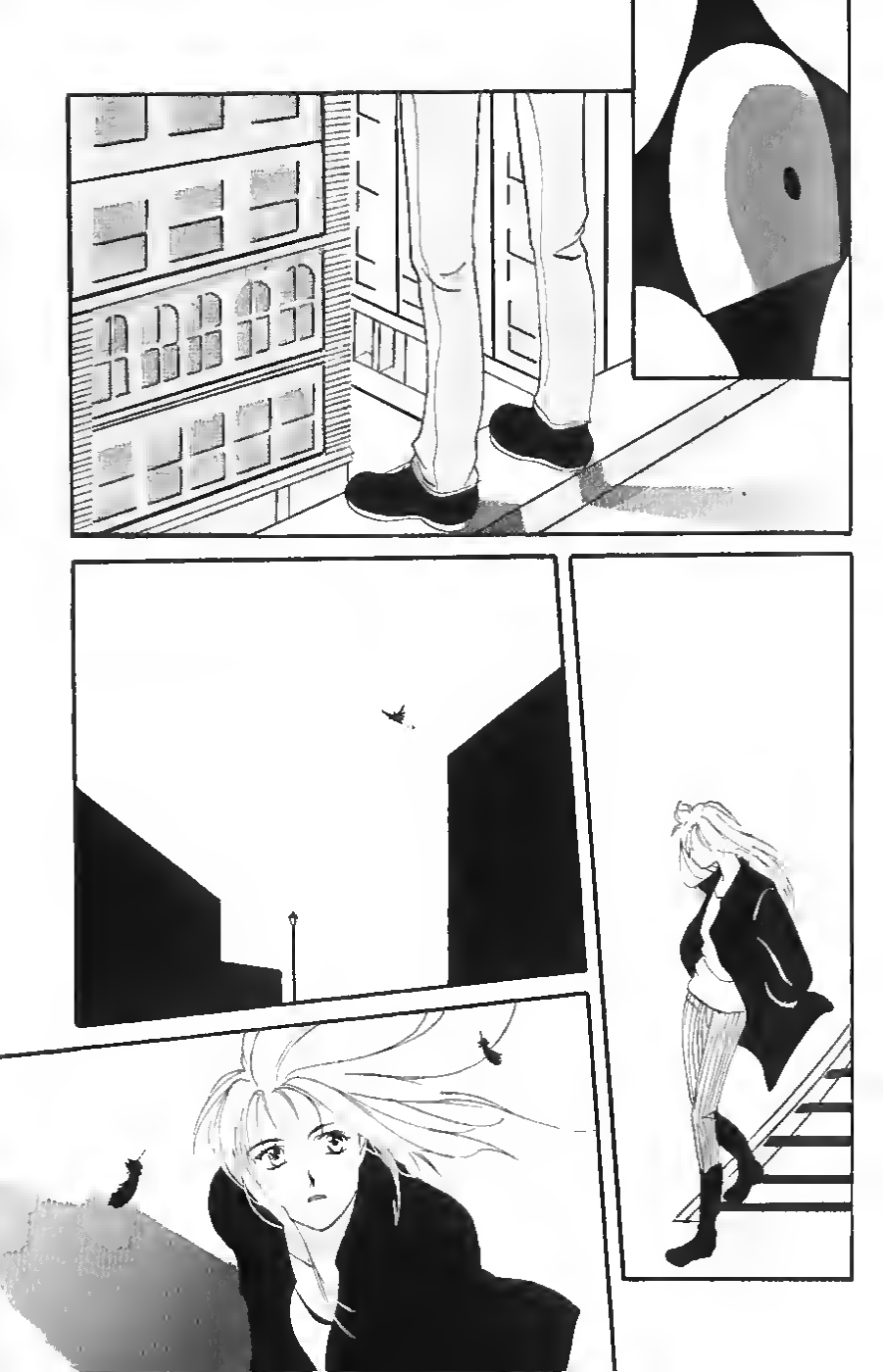
...WON'T YOU DANCE, ERIN?

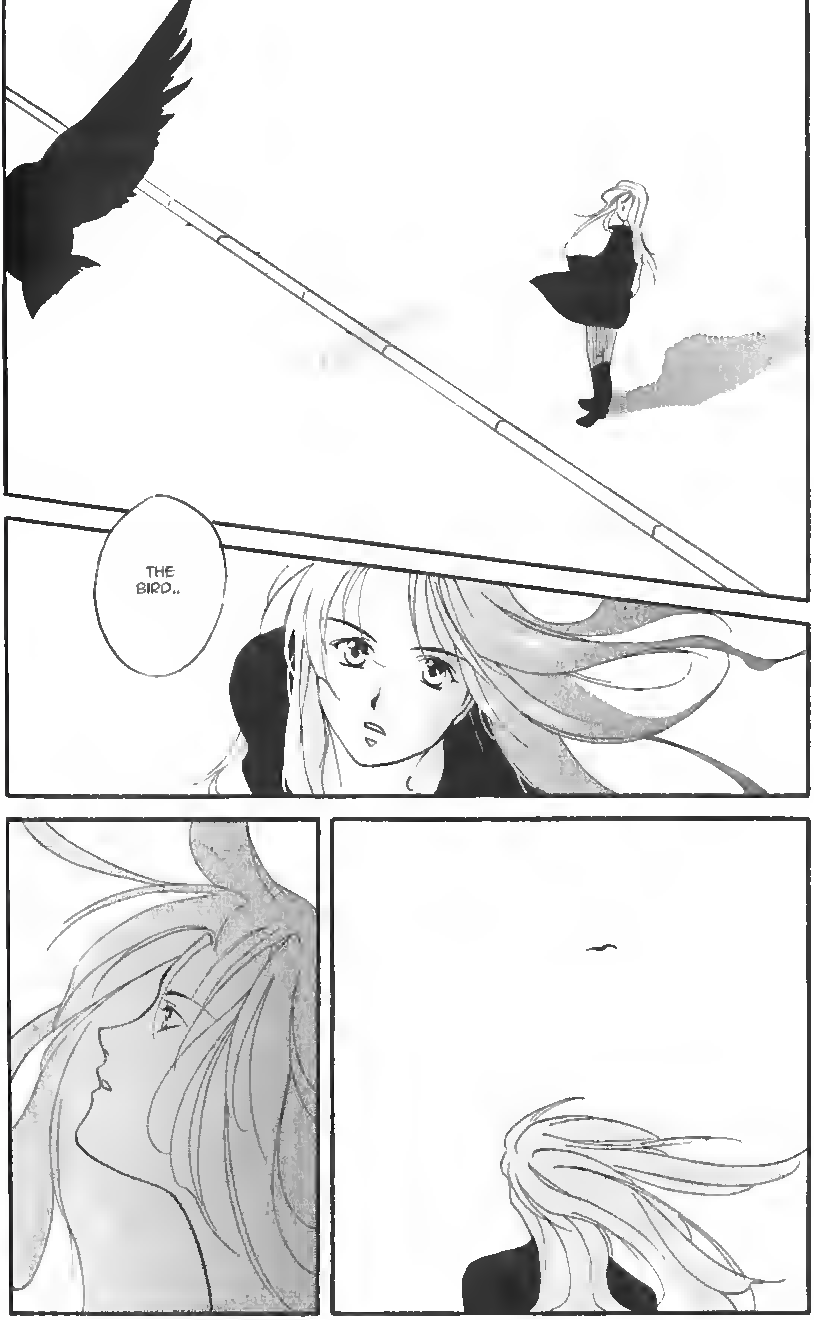
--I..
... C/N'T SAVE YOU, IZZY.

GOODBYE
TURN AROUND, ERIN— LOOK AT ME
NO THAT ISN'T HOW IT GOES

TURN AROUND...
TURN AROUND..


TURN
AROUND...




THE BIRD..

THE
BIRD
TO
THE
SKY...

...AND HE FELL TO THE EARTH
MY ONLY WISH IS

I WANT YOU ,
YOUR RED PULSE..

THAT'S MY ONE, SHAMEFUL WISH.

Craving . END

Craving . 1994 .

The first manga I drew after graduating from high school.

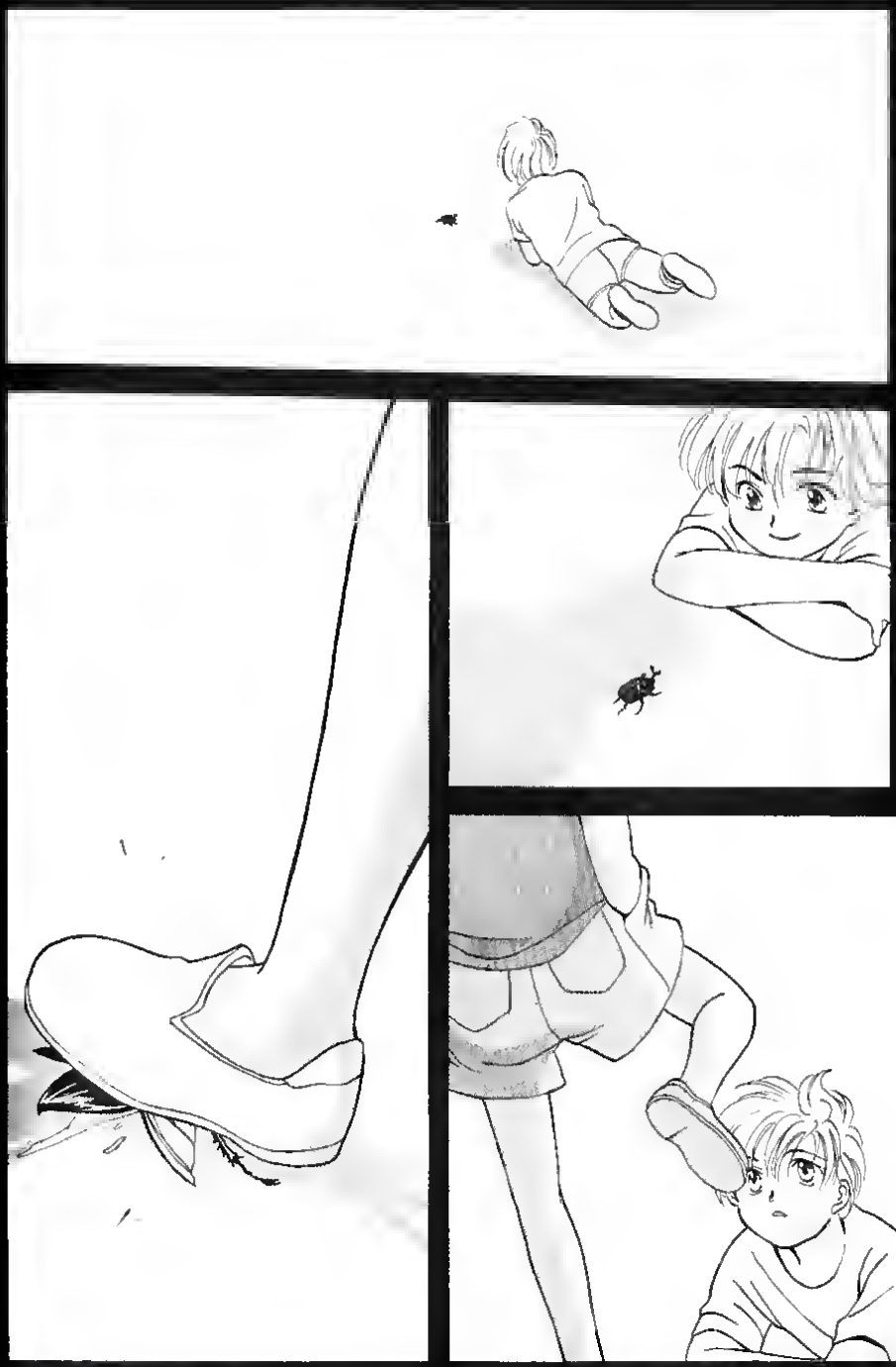
Somehow, it was like a lid had been opened, and for the first time I couldn't stop drawing: my first step into addiction.

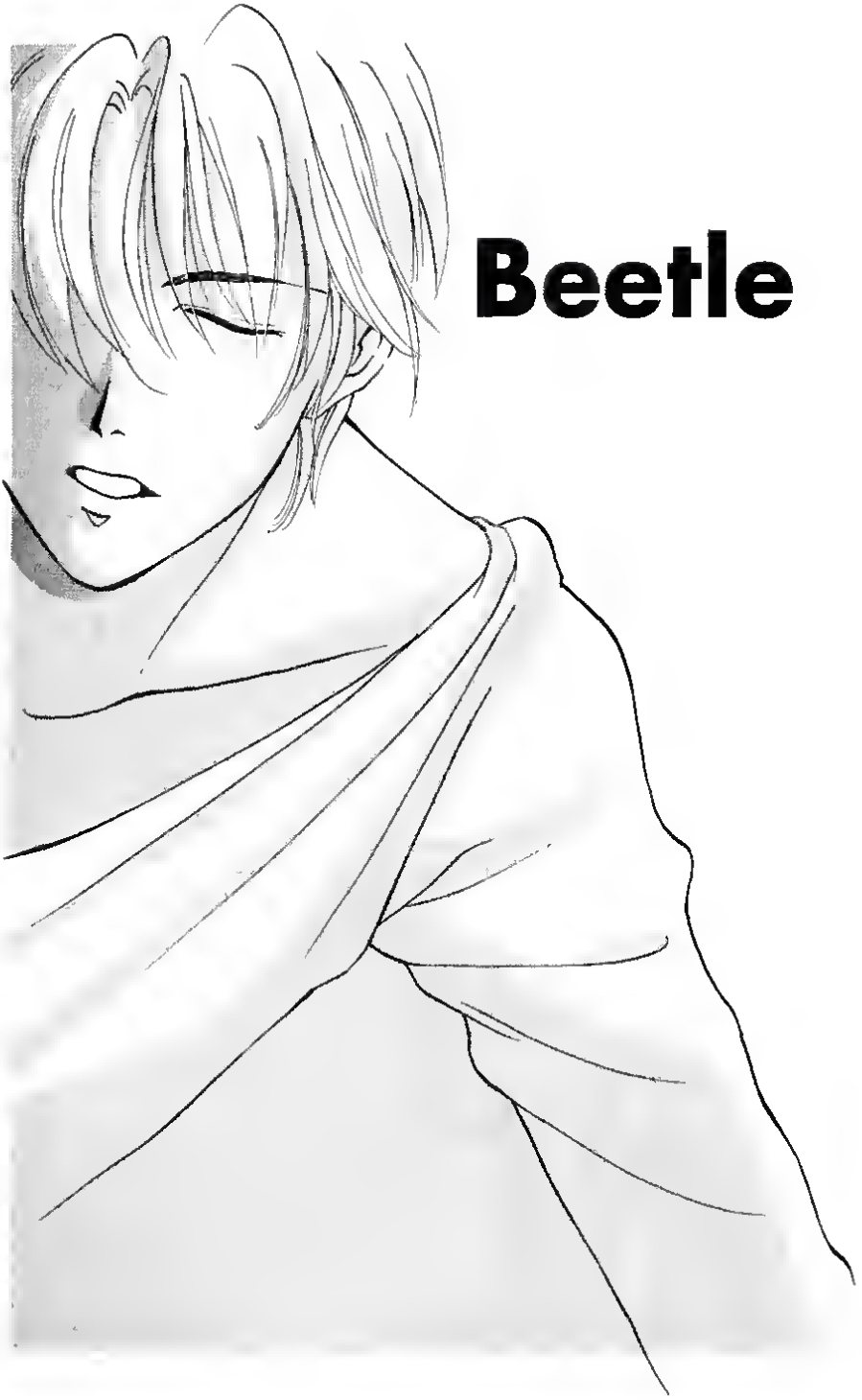
An idiotically weak protagonist.

Even people so weak they can't survive here come to this world searching for something. Beside themselves with excitement at how wonderful it's going to be, how much fun.

If, someday, my child is born with a face like that, I know I won't have any idea what to do.

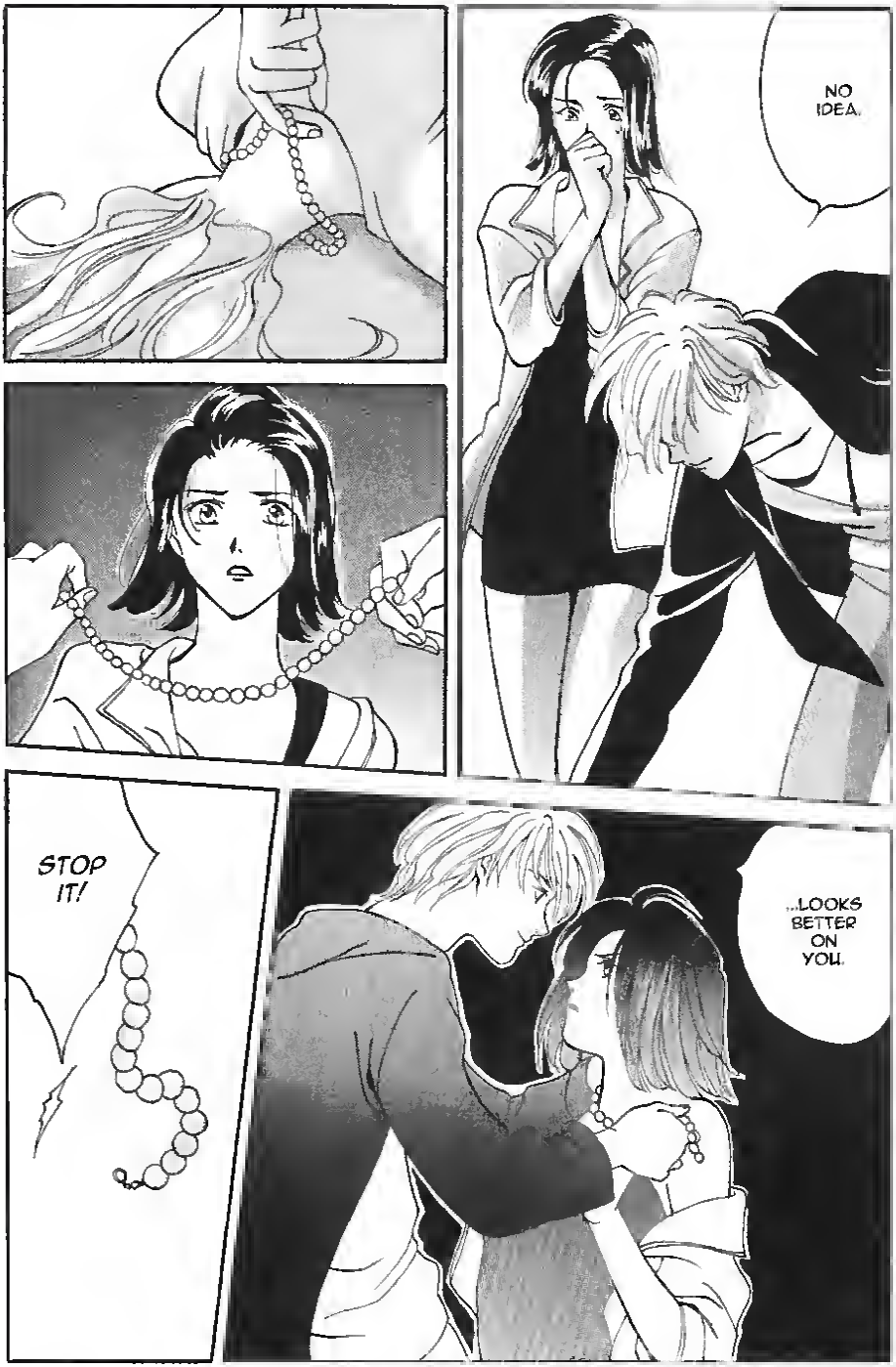
Beetle




Beetle

!!
TIM!

TIM!
YOU DIDN'T— NOT AGAIN!
DINER
OH, HI.
IS SHE DEAD?


NO IDEA.
STOP IT!
...LOOKS BETTER ON YOU.

WHAT HAPPENED!?
THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH YOU!
WHY!?
WHY DO YOU DO STUFF LIKE THIS!?
.....
...I HAD A WEIRD DREAM.
YOU DID THIS OVER SOMETHING LIKE THAT!? THAT'S A LITTLE KID'S EXCUSE!
..SO...
. AND WHEN I WOKE UP, YOU WEREN'T THERE..

.....
..NO...
EVEN A KID WOULDN'T MURDER OVER SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
BUT YOU KNOW, LIZE...
...KIDS HAVE MOTHERS
RIGHT?

HEAR THAT? THAT'S YOU.
A RANDOM SERIAL MUGGER.
PHANTOM
HUH.
SO SHE DIDN'T DIE, THEN.
THAT IS NOT THE PROBLEM HERE!
ISN'T THAT NICE?

---TIM.
.....
THEY'LL CATCH YOU SOME-DAY!
WE WON'T BE ABLE TO STAY TOGETHER THEN!
TIM, LOOK AT ME.
ARE YOU LISTEN-ING?
HOW YOU LIVE IS UP TO YOU...
...BUT IF WE'RE GOING TO BE TOGETHER, SOME THINGS ARE NECESSARY, YOU KNOW?

YOU'RE SICK, YOU MUST BE.
I MEAN, I CAN'T EVEN LEAVE YOU HOME ALONE.
I WANT TO CURE YOU.
I WANT TO HELP.
TELL ME WHERE IT HURTS, OKAY?

I HAD TIME TO FEEL THE SILENCE.
I COULD FEEL MYSELF NOT SEEING ANYTHING, NOT HEARING A SOUND.
I USED TO BE ABLE TO STAY HOME BY MYSELF.
REALLY.
WHEN I WAS LITTLE, I WAS ALONE ALL THE TIME.
BUT NOW WHEN I'M ALONE, I ALWAYS FEEL UNEASY

MAMA, LOOK!
I HATCHED A BEETLE
OH, MY!
THAT'S TERRIFIC

I--
I HATCHED IT FROM ITS CHRYSALIS.

LIZE!
--LIZE--

LIZE?

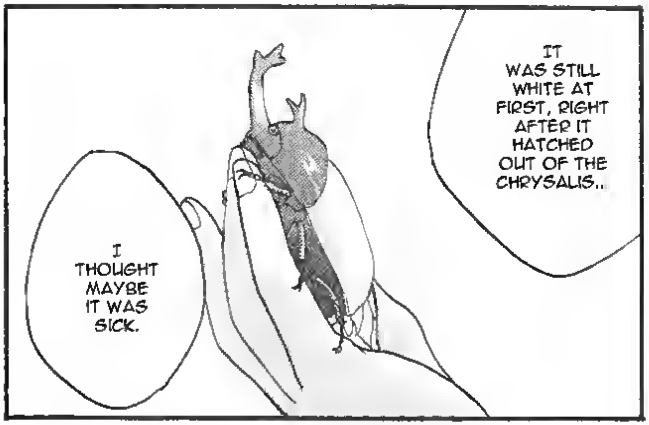
REEN

OH... YOU CAME BACK.
LIZE...

WHERE DID YOU GO!?
!!
--WITH A GUN!?
...TO LOOK FOR YOU...

I'M LEAVING.
I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANY MORE.

I KEEP DREAMING.
DREAMS ABOUT WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
I RAISED A BEETLE LARVA ALL THE WAY THROUGH ITS HATCHING.


I THOUGHT MAYBE IT WAS SICK.
IT WAS STILL WHITE AT FIRST, RIGHT AFTER IT HATCHED OUT OF THE CHRYSALIS..

I'D TRIED IT LOTS OF TIMES, BUT THAT WAS THE ONLY ONE THAT HATCHED.

MAMA COULDN'T BELIEVE IT.
I WAS SO HAPPY, I JUST WATCHED IT ALL THE TIME..
BUT AFTER HALF A DAY, THE WINGS TURNED PRETTY AND BLACK.

I WAS REALLY, REALLY CAREFUL WITH IT, BUT..

HE STOMPED ON IT AND SQUISHED IT ALL TO PIECES

I LET MY RAGE TAKE OVER, AND I PUNCHED HIM...
MY FISTS HIT HIS FACE, LIKE IT WAS FUN..
BLOOD CAME OUT
MAYBE THAT'S WHY.
WHEN I WENT HOME, MAMA WAS REALLY, REALLY MAD.

I CAN EVEN KILL PEOPLE...
SO WHY DO I STILL SEE IT IN MY DREAMS?
I CAN SQUISH BUGS NOW WITHOUT CARING ONE BIT.
WHY...?
WHY...?

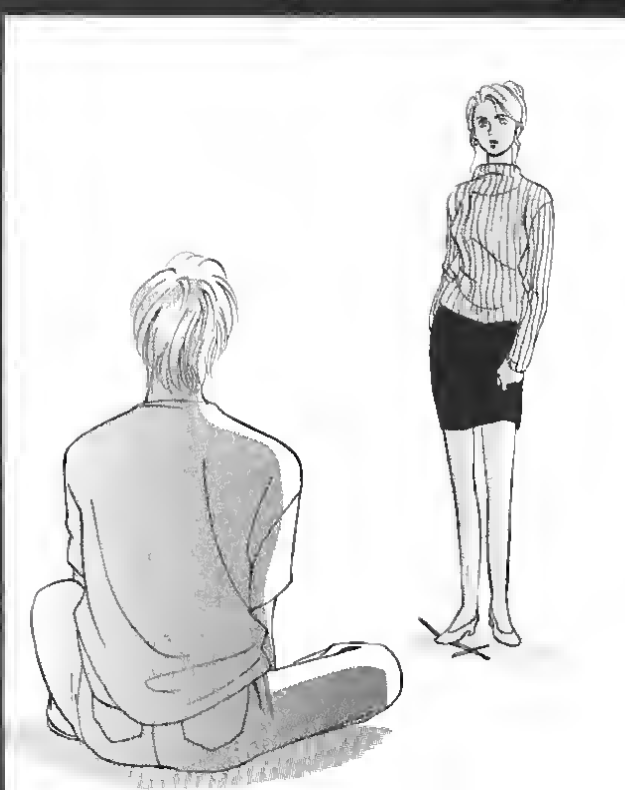
IT JUST MEANS THE HOSPITAL COMES FIRST, THEN THE POLICE.
THAT'S NO EXCUSE FOR KILLING
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND
...I CAN'T SO MUCH AS TOUCH IT.
YOUR HEART'S AS TRANSPARENT AS GLASS, BUT...

I CAN'T HANDLE IT ANY MORE..
KACHK
IF YOU NEED UNDER-STANDING, FIND SOMEBODY ELSE.
NO, DON'T!
YOU'RE GOOD. I WANT YOU.
I WANT YOU.

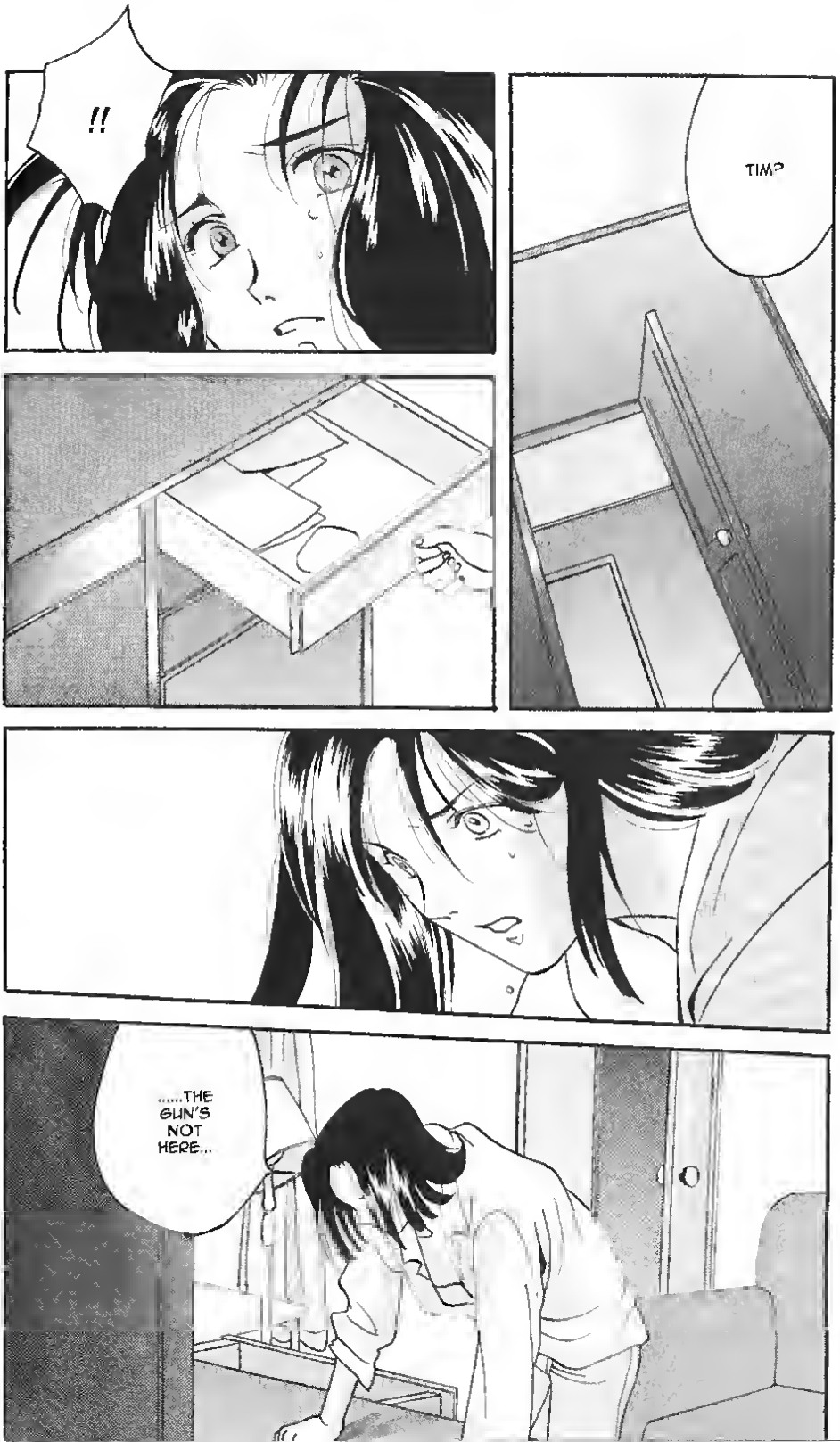
IT ALWAYS FELL OVER, NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I PUT IT UP

THE CROSS ON THE GRAVE

NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I..



TIM!


!!
TIM?
.....THE GUN'S NOT HERE...

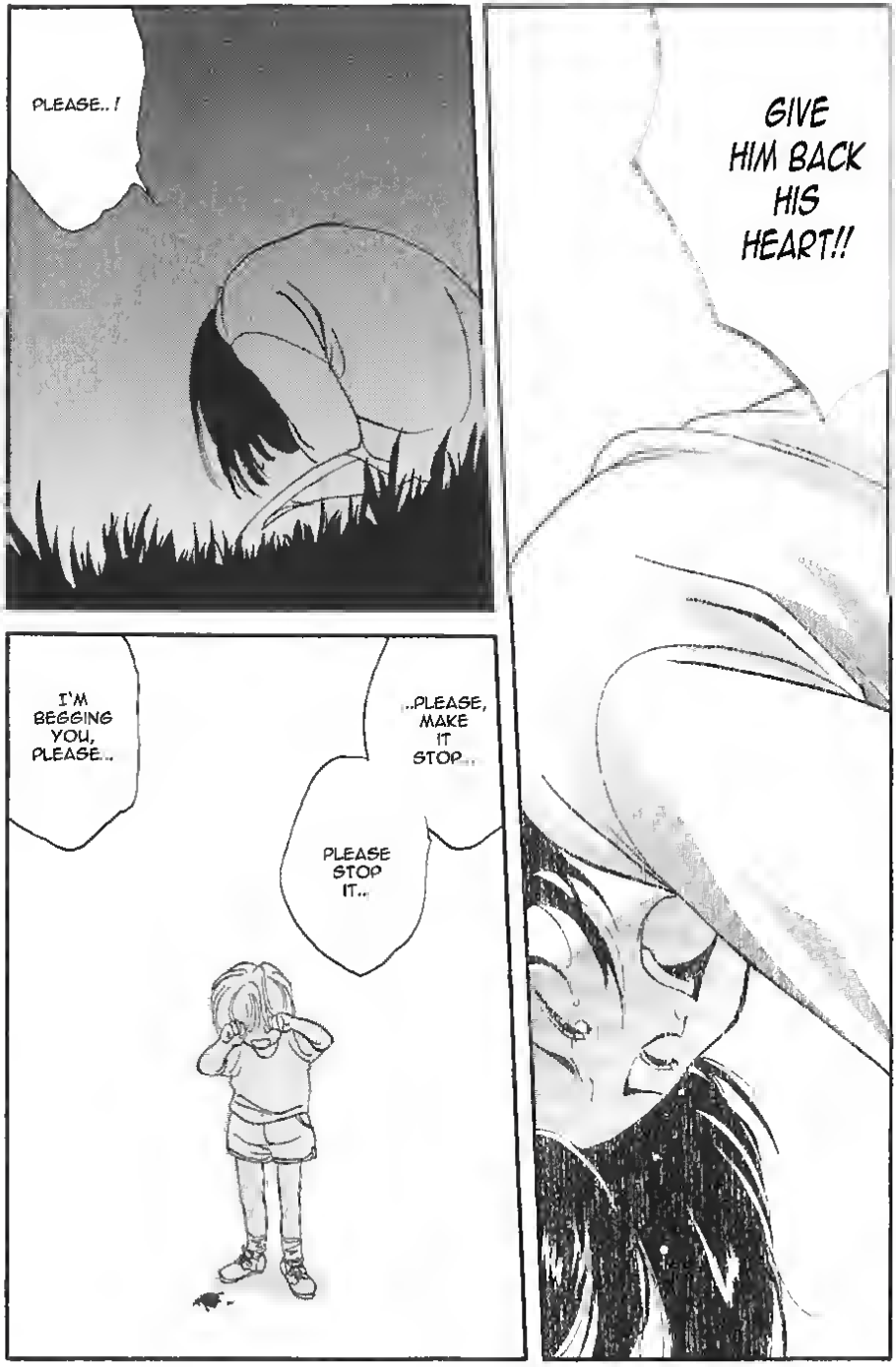
THAT'S A POLICE SIREN!

Hah
Hah...
!!
AH-
!
TIM...?
....WHERE DID YOU GO...?
Hah.....
Hah
Hah

PLEASE...!!
DO... DON'T SHOOT ME...
FREEZE!!

DROP YOUR GUN!!

Hah
Hah
Hah
hah
.....GOD, PLEASE..
hah...
PLEASE DON'T TAKE HIM AWAY...


PLEASE..!
GIVE HIM BACK HIS HEART!!
I'M BEGGING YOU, PLEASE..
..PLEASE, MAKE IT STOP...
PLEASE STOP IT..

TIM!
TIM!!

I GUESS THIS'S GOODBYE
...HERE

THANK YOU.
Beetle.END

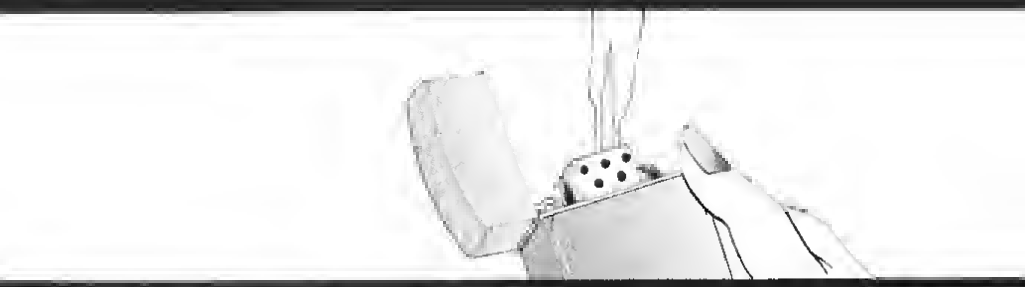
Beetle. 1994.

This one ran in "Wings", not "South"... Right? Yeah. A disgustingly needy and demanding protagonist. None of the guys I draw could survive without women.

When I was in the middle of drawing this, I was walking down the road, and there was a beetle larva lying there. I thought, "Whoa? He'd be perfect for a model," and I was going to take him home, but he was really big, and wherever I picked him up, he'd wriggle in this really creepy way. He was weirdly cushy and warm to the touch, and around his rear end there was all this hair that really didn't need to be there. I grappled with feeling grossed out for about five minutes, lost the fight, and left him right where he was. Kinda feels like I lost to myself.

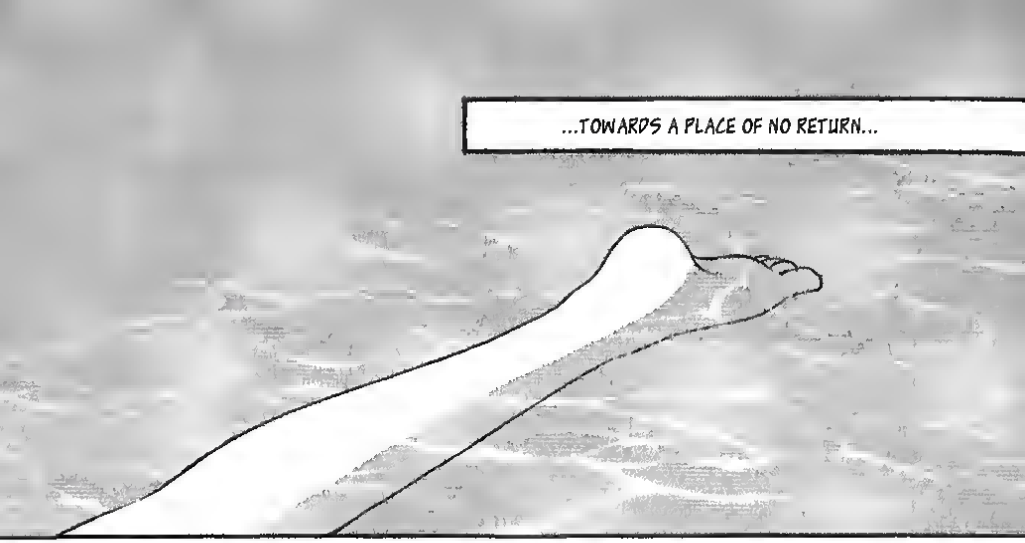
Pretty Bee

WHEN I WAS A CHILD THE OCEAN WAS NOT THE OCEAN

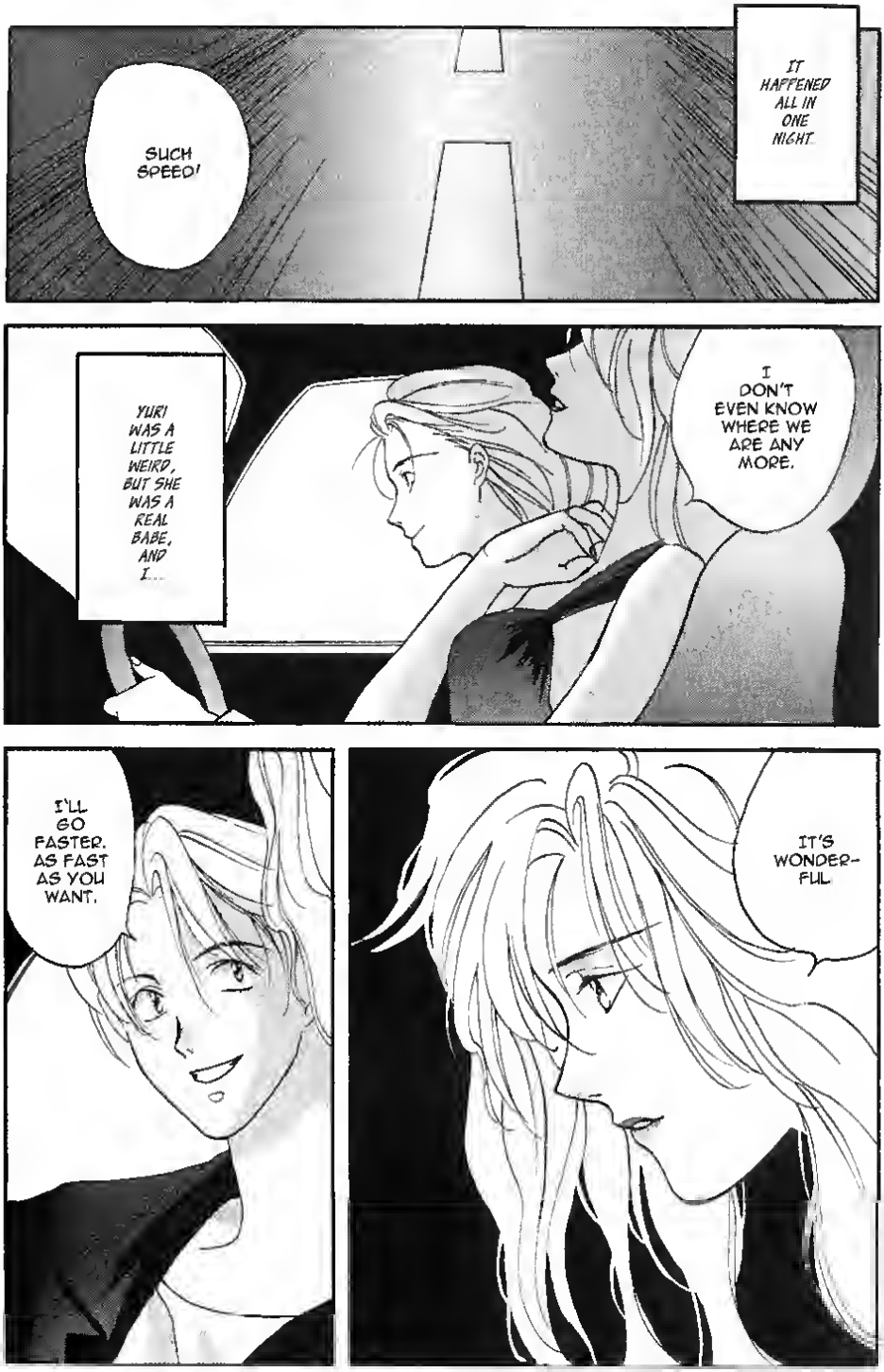


I WOULD STARE AT IT UNBLINKING

WATCHING THE WAVES BECKON MY BRIMMING, CHAOTIC HEART...


...TOWARDS A PLACE OF NO RETURN...

Pretty Bee

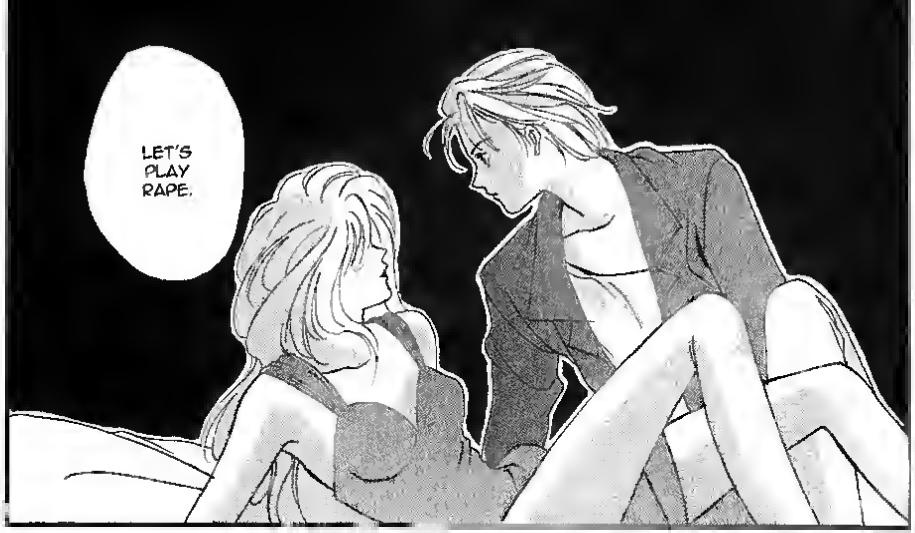

IT HAPPENED ALL IN ONE NIGHT.
SUCH SPEED!
YURI WAS A LITTLE WEIRD, BUT SHE WAS A REAL BABE, AND I...
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE WE ARE ANY MORE.
I'LL GO FASTER. AS FAST AS YOU WANT.
IT'S WONDER-FUL.

*Mirrors which face each other so that your reflection is repeated between the two until it disappears into shadow. There's an urban legend in Japan that if you look into one of these at two in the morning, you'll lose your soul and/or die

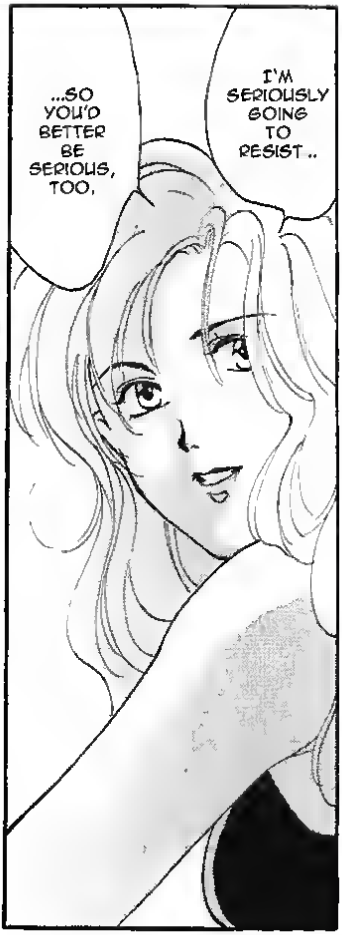
RIGHT.
THAT'S RIGHT.
WHAT BABY...? YOU MEAN, MY BABY...?
...YOU LOST THE BABY!?
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW YOU WERE PREGNANT--
WHEN YOU SAY "LOST", YOU MEAN...
I'M FINE.
I'M USED TO IT.

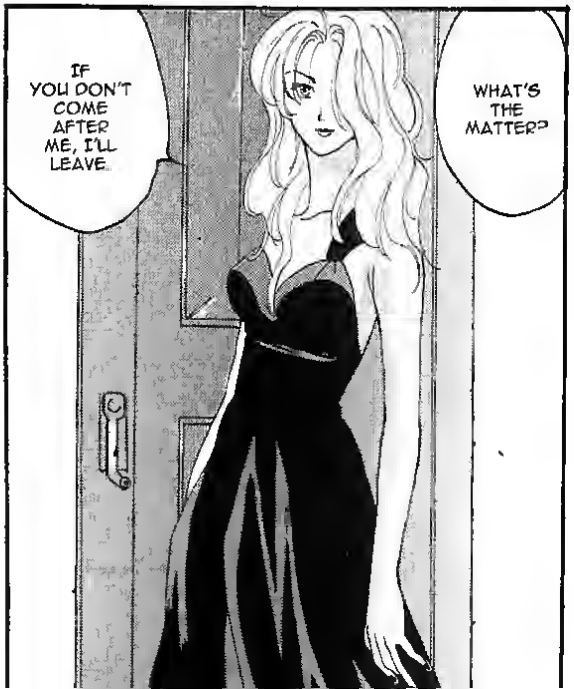
YURI, HONEY, ARE YOU TELLING ME...
...WHAT'S THIS~~?
HUH?
.....
.....
YOU WANTED MY KID?
...YOU WANTED IT?
MEN NEVER LOOK MORE IDIOTIC THAN AT TIMES LIKE THIS.
YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING, DO YOU.

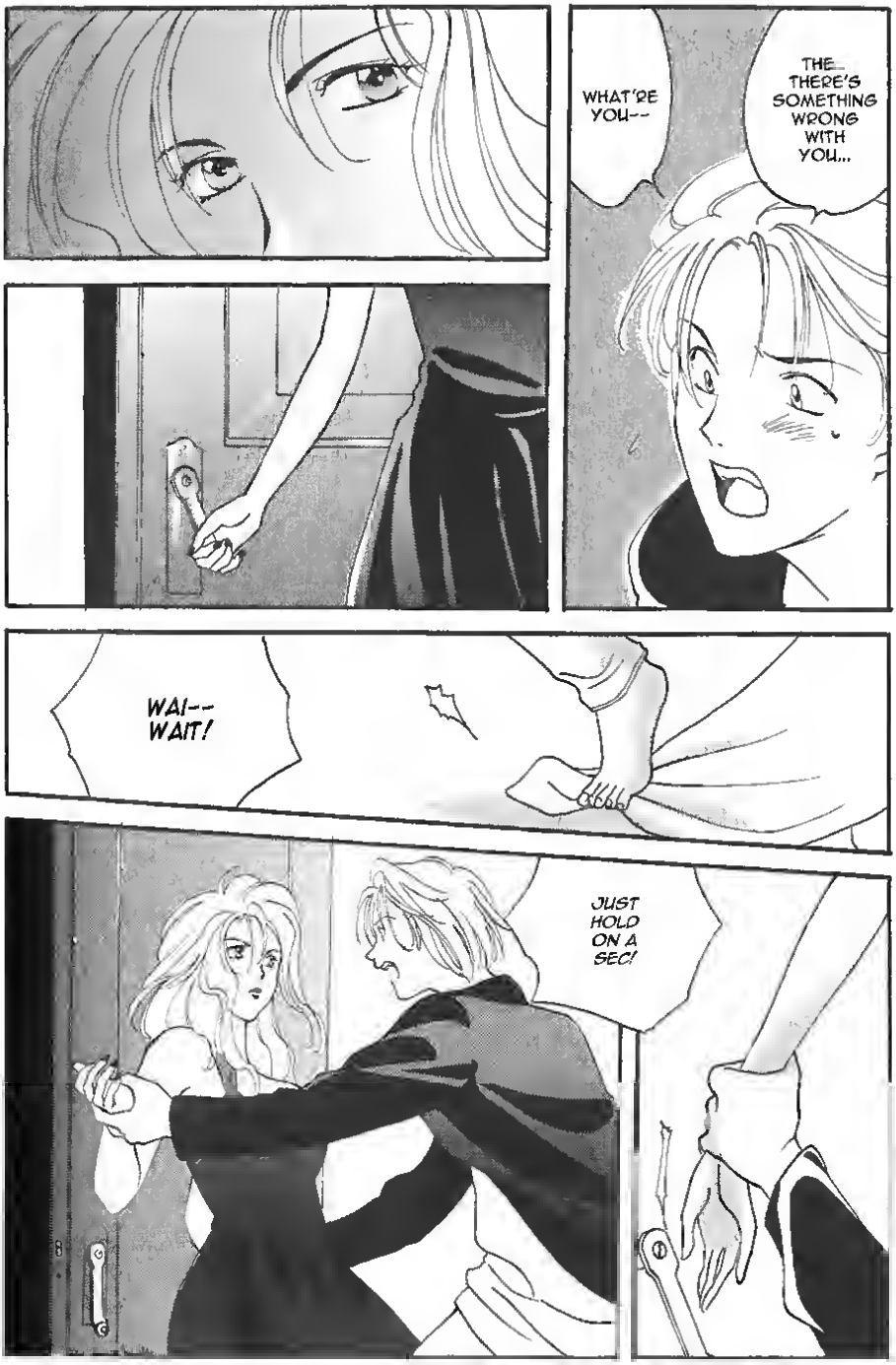
WE CAN ALWAYS MAKE ANOTHER KID, YA KNOW.
OH, C'MON, WHAT'RE YOU ALL MAD ABOUT?
I JUST THOUGHT OF A FUN GAME.
.....


LET'S PLAY RAPE.

HE... HEY..
THIS KIND OF GAME ISN'T ANY FUN UNLESS YOU'RE SERIOUS ABOUT IT.


I'M SERIOUSLY GOING TO RESIST..
...SO YOU'D BETTER BE SERIOUS, TOO.


IF YOU DON'T COME AFTER ME, I'LL LEAVE.
WHAT'S THE MATTER?


WHAT'RE YOU--
THE... THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH YOU...
WAI-- WAIT!
JUST HOLD ON A SEC!

DAMMIT!
AH-!
I SAID, WAIT!

GOOD. JUST LIKE THAT.
YURI!
LITTLE BY LITTLE ...
...I LOST MYSELF IN YURI'S GAME.

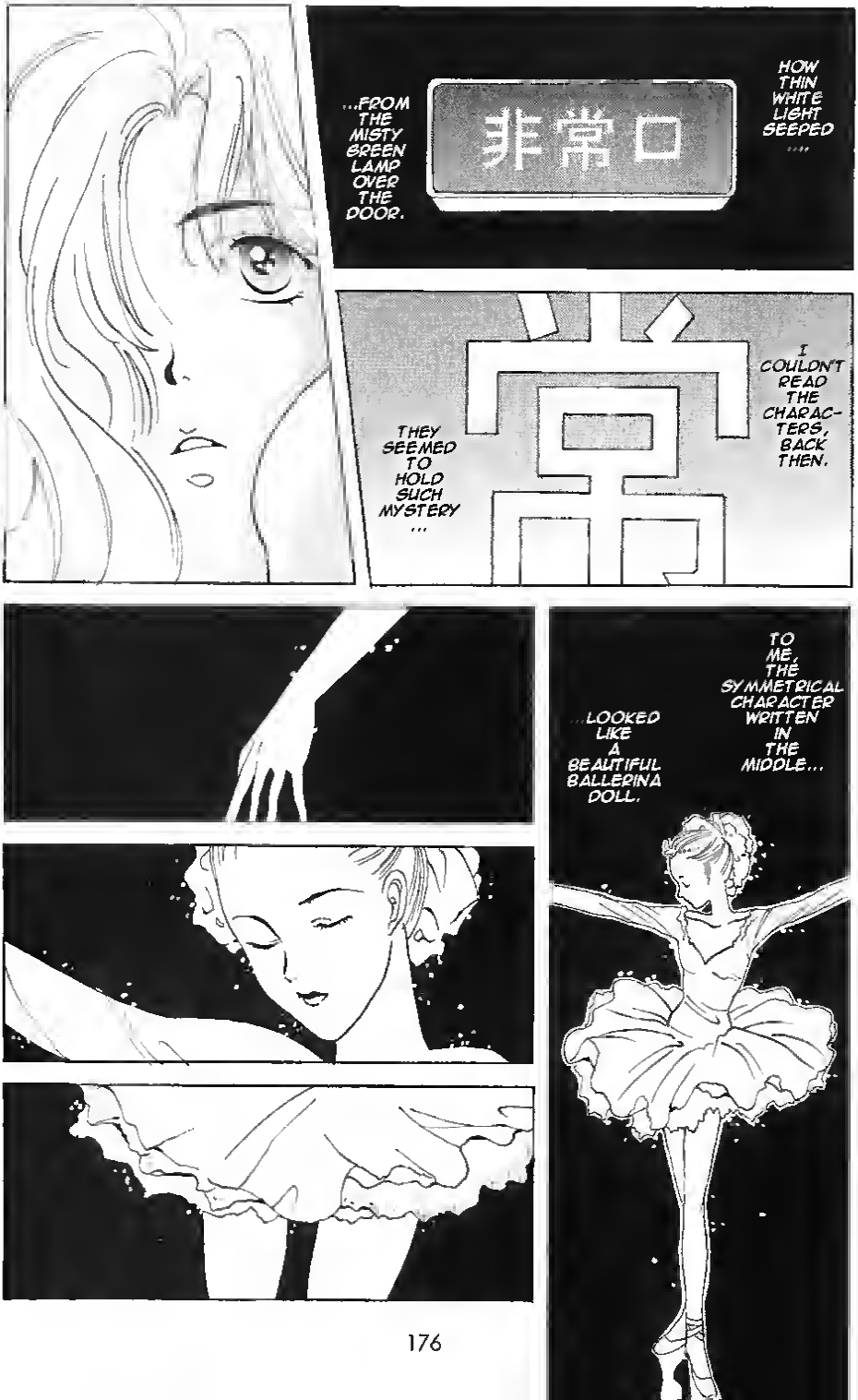
THE LIGHT DAZZLED ME.
LIKE SOME FILTHY WORM...
...I CHASED HER WHITE LEGS...
AH-!
LOOK AT ME!
C'MON, WOMAN!
!

.....
.....
!!
.....I-

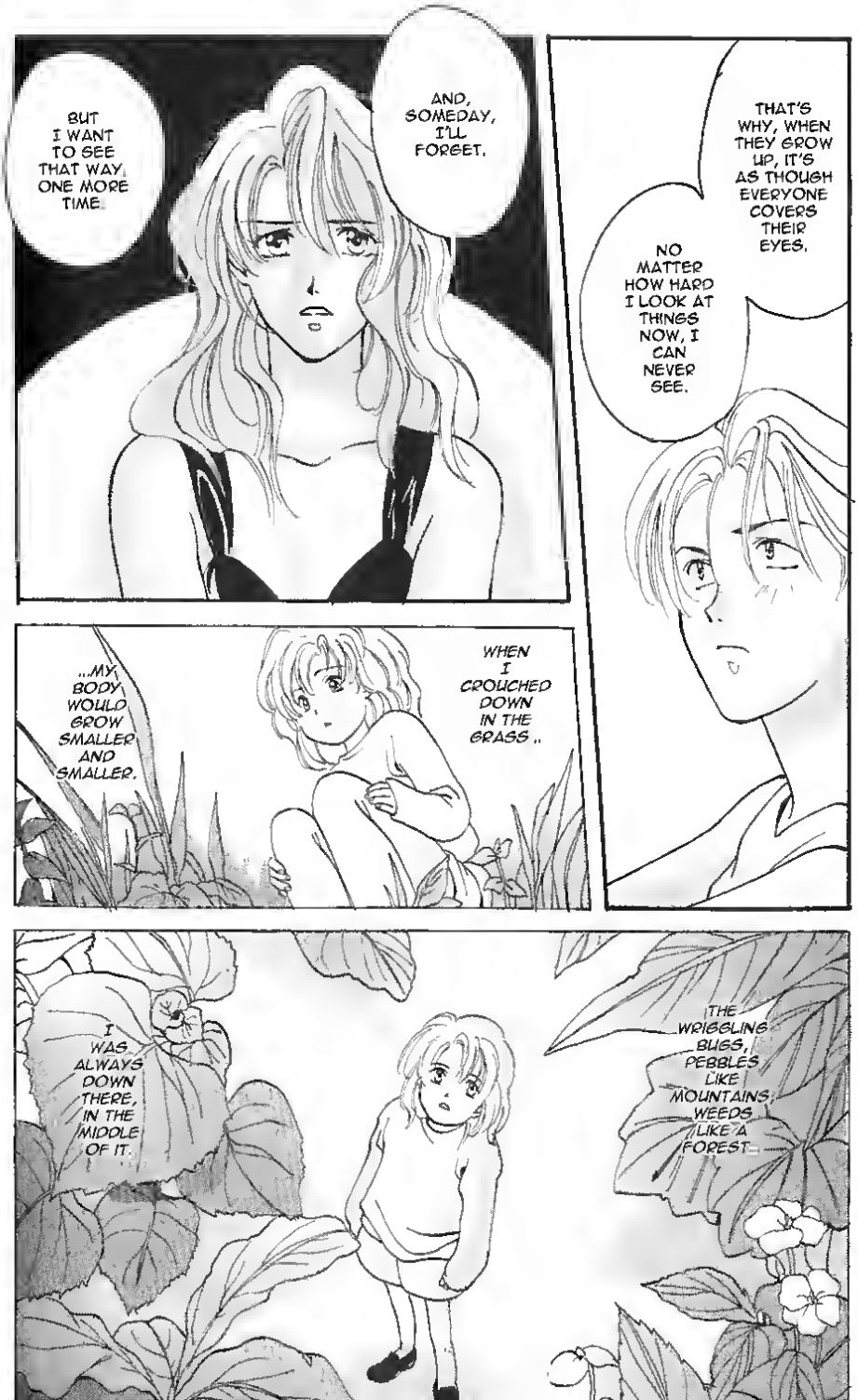
NO...
YOU'VE GOT IT WRONG ...
I GOT CARRIED AWAY.
I'M SORRY!
DID I HURT YOU, OR...
YURI?
.....
.....

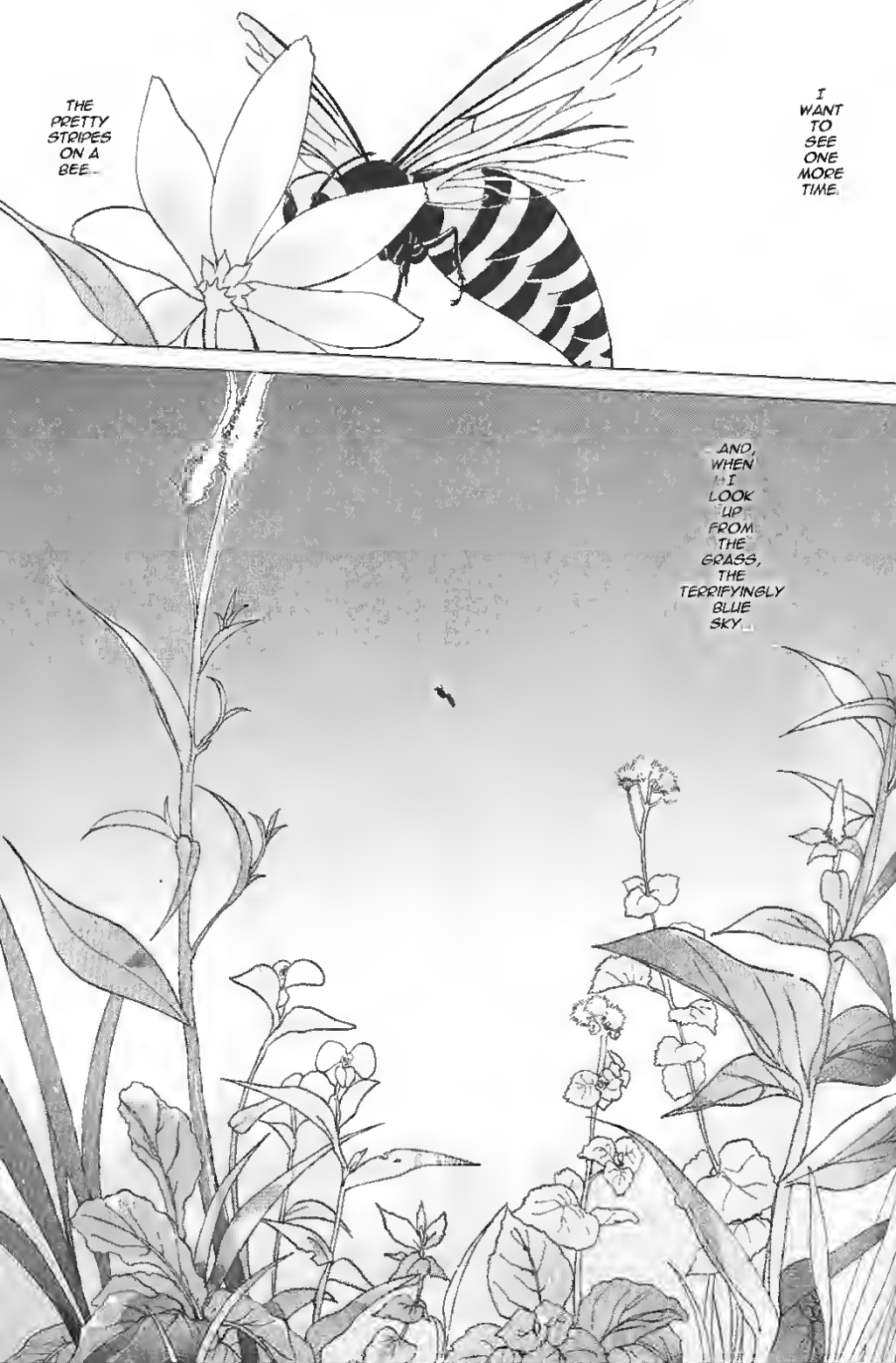
WHEN I WAS A KID?
NOTHIN' MUCH. I WAS JUST YOUR AVERAGE BRAT.
I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING BIG.
I WONDER.
YOU'VE PROBABLY JUST FORGOT-TEN.
EVERYONE DOES, YOU KNOW. FORGET
IT FEELS AS THOUGH, BACK THEN, I SAW EVER SO MUCH MORE THAN I DO NOW.
I THOUGHT, IF I HAD A BABY, I'D REMEMBER ALL OF IT.

....WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU SAW 'MORE'?
.....
...WHEN I WAS LITTLE...
..MY MOTHER OPENED A SMALL BAR.
SHE OFTEN TOOK ME THERE WITH HER.
I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND A WORD OF THE ADULTS' DRUNK CONVERSATIONS...
IT WAS NO FUN AT ALL.
SO I ALWAYS LOOKED AT THINGS, BY MYSELF.

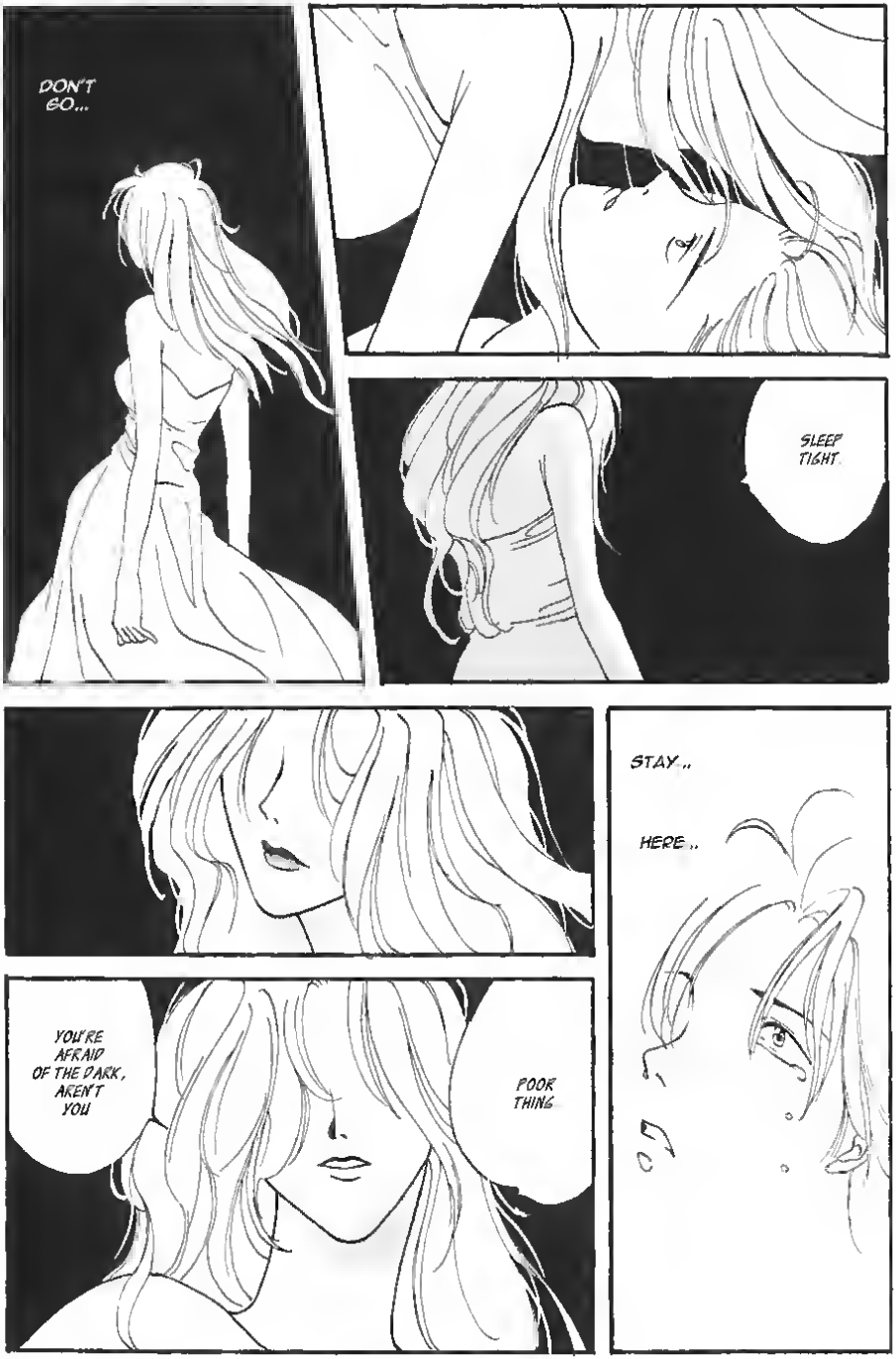

...FROM THE MISTY GREEN LAMP OVER THE DOOR.
非常口
HOW THIN WHITE LIGHT SEEPED ...
常
THEY SEEMED TO HOLD SUCH MYSTERY ...
I COULDN'T READ THE CHARACTERS, BACK THEN.
...LOOKED LIKE A BEAUTIFUL BALLERINA DOLL.
TO ME, THE SYMMETRICAL CHARACTER WRITTEN IN THE MIDDLE...

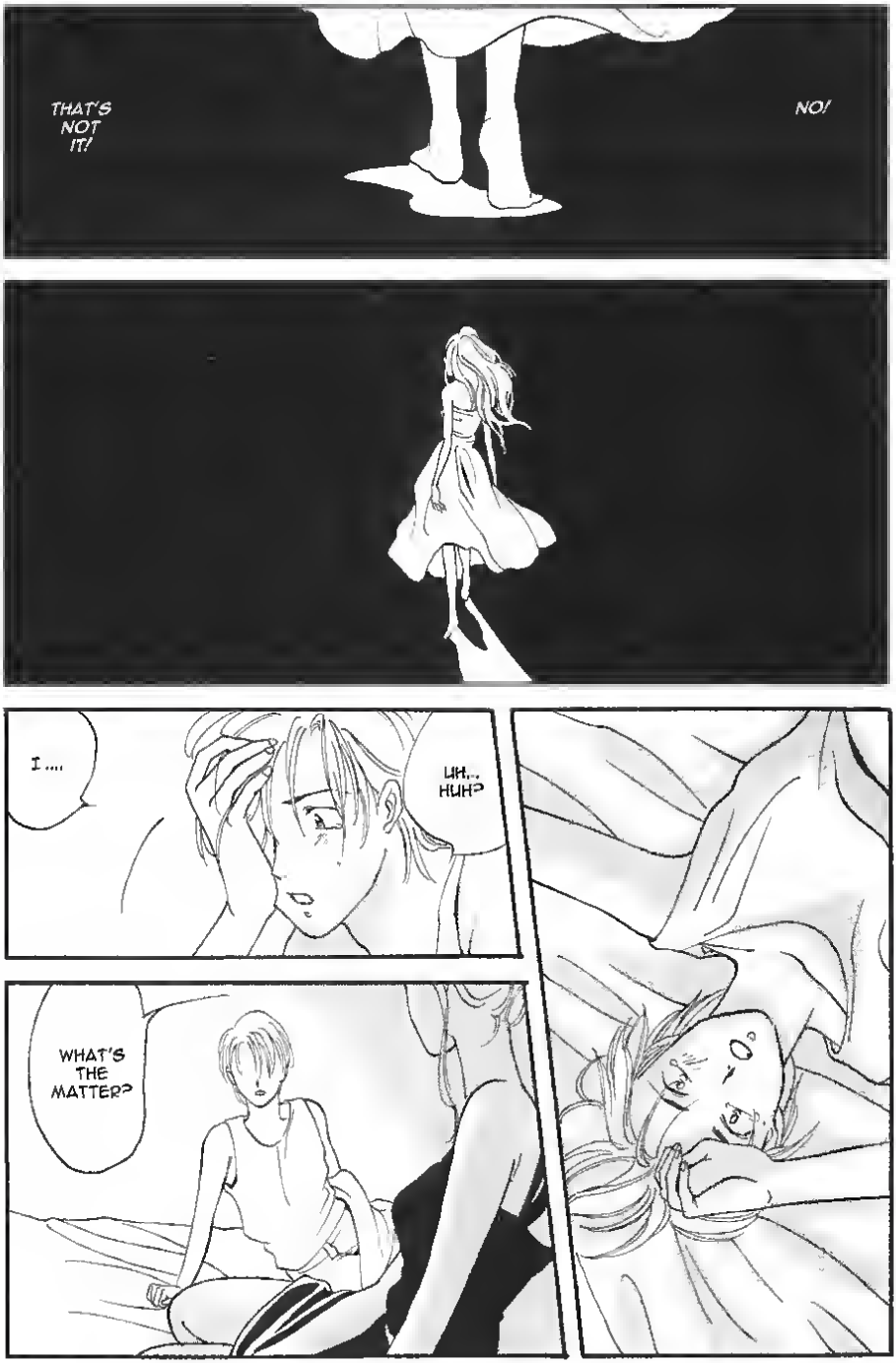
WHEN I LOOKED AT THE ONE ON THE LEFT ...
...I SAW A SAD, BENT-BACKED OLD COUPLE
THEY WERE CLASPING EACH OTHER'S SHRUNKEN, BONY HANDS, AND TALKING OF SOMETHING
THE ONE ON THE RIGHT WAS A WOMAN'S GAPING MOUTH
FUNNY, ISN'T IT? THOSE LETTERS EXIST TO COMMUNICATE SOMETHING, BUT IF YOU LOOK THEM CLOSELY...
THEY EXPOSE THEIR TRUE NATURE, UNINVITED.
YOU'RE WEIRD
I NEVER SAW ANYTHING LIKE THAT
I SUP-POSE NOT.
NOBODY CAN SPEND THEIR WHOLE LIFE AS A CHILD.
IF THEY SEE THE TRUTH - THE WHOLE TRUTH - HUMANS CAN'T GO ON LIVING.


BUT I WANT TO SEE THAT WAY, ONE MORE TIME.
AND, SOMEDAY, I'LL FORGET.
THAT'S WHY, WHEN THEY GROW UP, IT'S AS THOUGH EVERYONE COVERS THEIR EYES.
NO MATTER HOW HARD I LOOK AT THINGS NOW, I CAN NEVER SEE.
WHEN I CROUCHED DOWN IN THE GRASS ..
...MY BODY WOULD GROW SMALLER AND SMALLER.
I WAS ALWAYS DOWN THERE, IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.
THE WRIGGLING BUGS, PEBBLES LIKE MOUNTAINS, WEEDS LIKE A FOREST.


THE PRETTY STRIPES ON A BEE...
I WANT TO SEE ONE MORE TIME.
AND, WHEN I LOOK UP FROM THE GRASS, THE TERRIFYINGLY BLUE SKY...

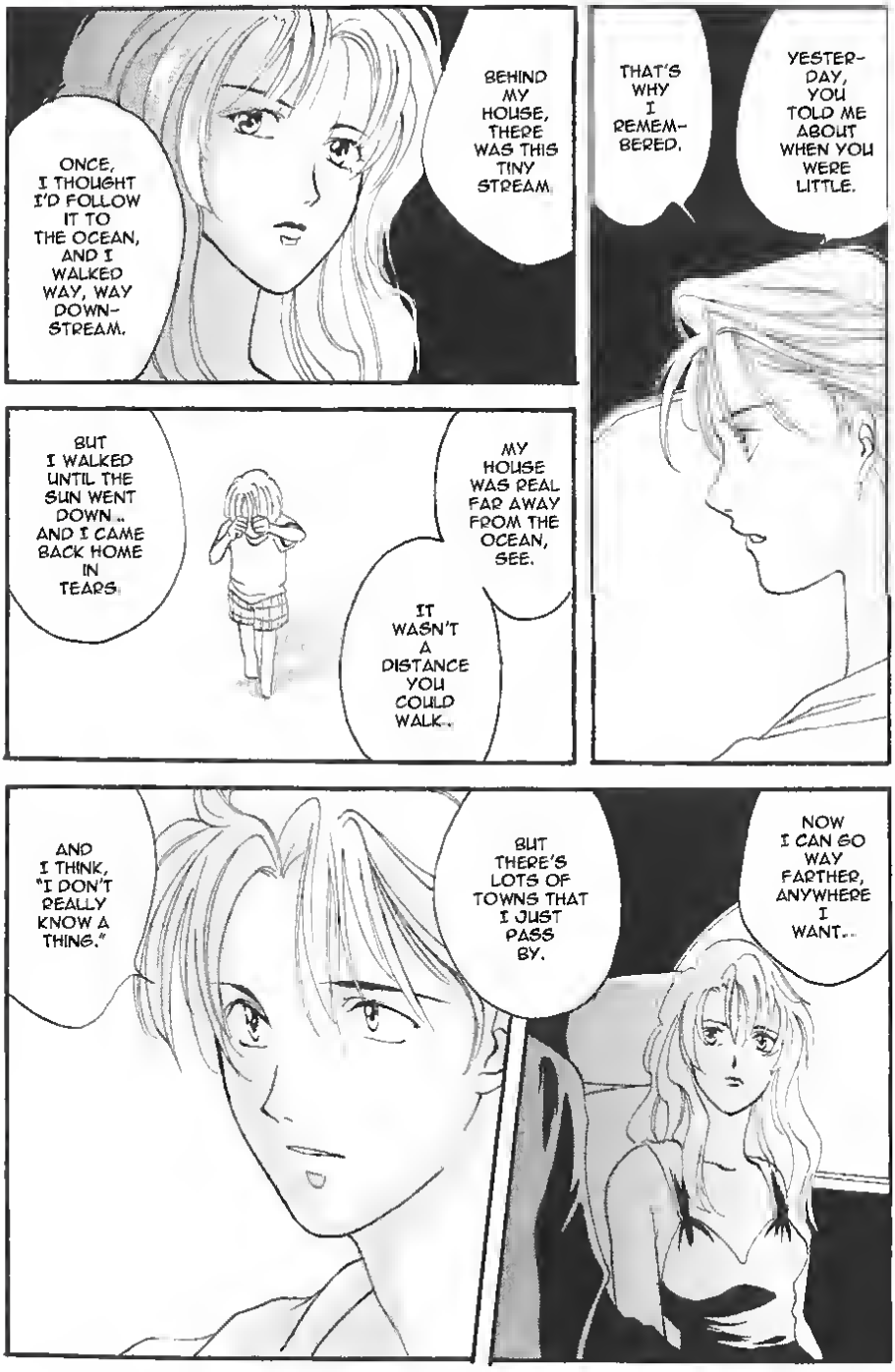
DARK...
WHO'S THERE?
MOM?


DON'T GO...
SLEEP TIGHT
STAY..
HERE..
YOU'RE AFRAID OF THE DARK, AREN'T YOU
POOR THING

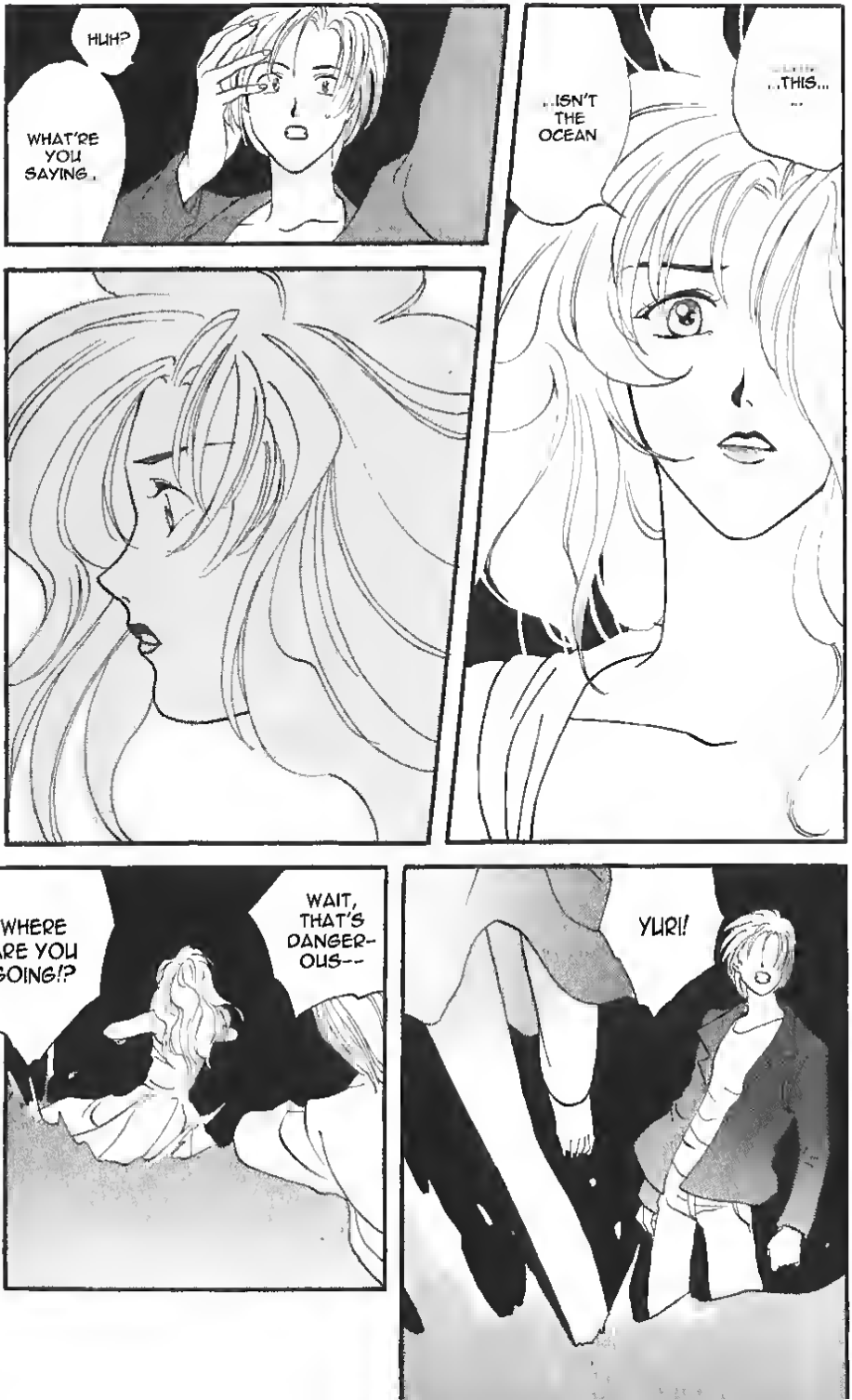

THAT'S NOT IT!
NO!
I....
UH... HUH?
WHAT'S THE MATTER?

WERE YOU DREAMING?
NO, UM..
HUH? WHAT WAS IT, AGAIN? I FORGOT..
phew
YOU KNOW...
YOU'RE ALWAYS AWAKE BY THE TIME I WAKE UP.
IT'S LIKE YOU NEVER SLEEP.

THEN SHE SAID SHE WANTED TO GO TO THE OCEAN.
"I SLEPT," SHE ANSWERED.
THAT IT FELT LIKE SHE'D REMEMBER SOMETHING THERE...
IT'S STILL DARK.
YURI ...
I REMEMBERED SOMETHING.


YESTER-
DAY,
YOU
TOLD ME
ABOUT
WHEN YOU
WERE
LITTLE.
THAT'S
WHY
I
REMEM-
BERED.
BEHIND
MY
HOUSE,
THERE
WAS THIS
TINY
STREAM.
ONCE,
I THOUGHT
I'D FOLLOW
IT TO
THE OCEAN,
AND I
WALKED
WAY, WAY
DOWN-
STREAM.
MY
HOUSE
WAS REAL
FAR AWAY
FROM THE
OCEAN,
SEE.
IT
WASN'T
A
DISTANCE
YOU
COULD
WALK..
BUT
I WALKED
UNTIL THE
SUN WENT
DOWN..
AND I CAME
BACK HOME
IN
TEARS.
NOW
I CAN GO
WAY
FARTHER,
ANYWHERE
I
WANT..
BUT
THERE'S
LOTS OF
TOWNS THAT
I JUST
PASS
BY.
AND
I THINK,
"I DON'T
REALLY
KNOW A
THING."

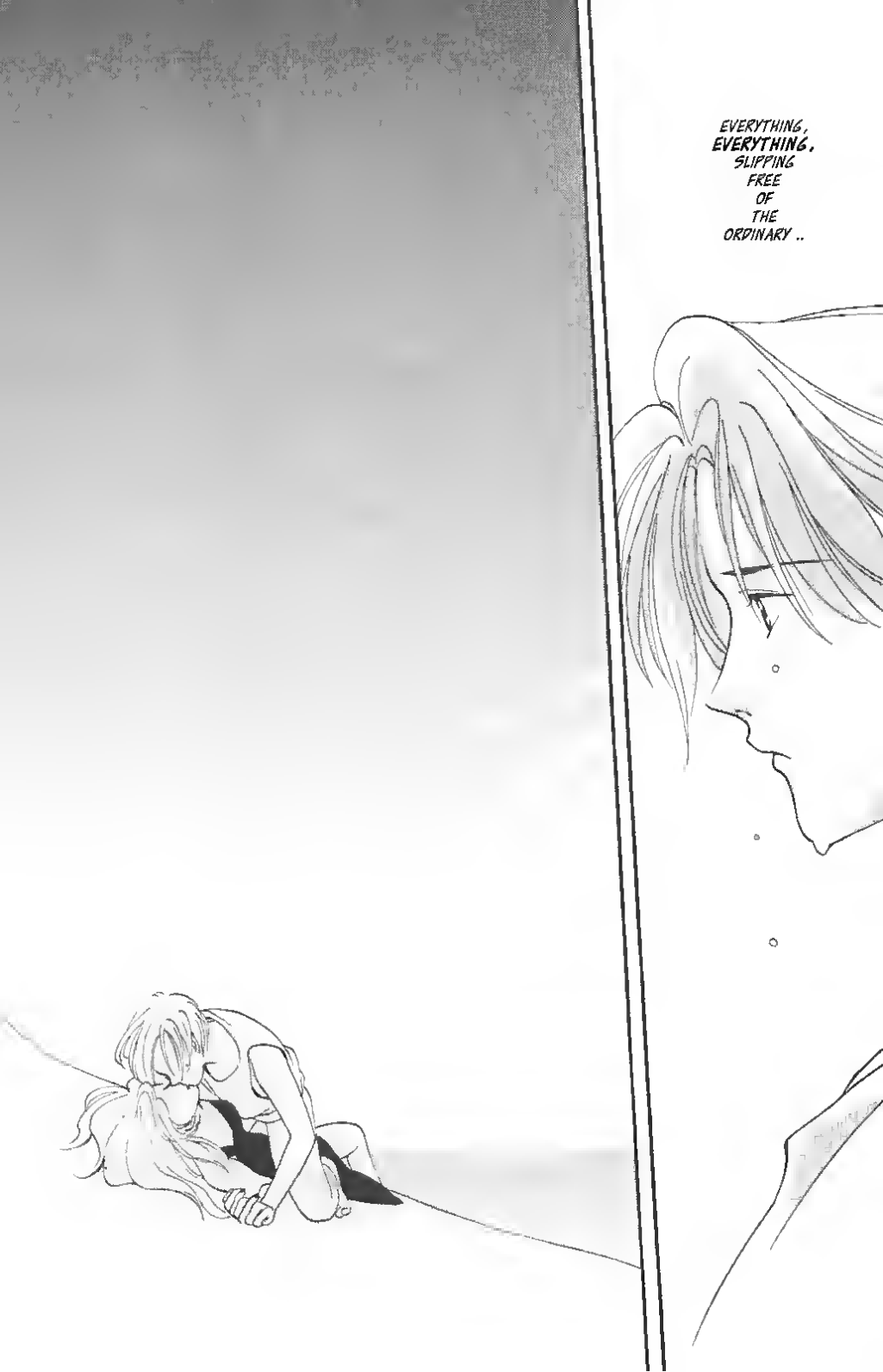
I CAN'T SEE THE HORIZON.
THE SUN'LL COME UP SOON.
...IT'S PITCH BLACK.


HUH?
WHAT'RE YOU SAYING.
..THIS...
..ISN'T THE OCEAN
WAIT, THAT'S DANGER-OUS--
WHERE ARE YOU GOING!?
YURI!

DON'T YOU SEE?
THIS ISN'T THE OCEAN ANY-MORE!
I CAN'T SEE ANY-THING!
--NO, NO, I CAN'T!
I CAN SEE IT!
I REMEMBERED! THIS ISN'T THE OCEAN!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!? COME BACK!!
STOP IT!
IF YOU SEE THAT SORT OF THING, YOU CAN'T GO ON LIVING--
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SAID SO, REMEM-BER!?
COME BACK!!

DON'T GO! YURI!!
POOR THING! YOU'RE AFRAID.

I WANT TO SEE, ONE MORE TIME.
A BALLERINA DOLL BEGINNING TO DANCE
THE TERRIFYINGLY BLUE SKY...
THE WRIGGLING BUGS
PEBBLES LIKE MOUNTAINS
WEEDS LIKE A FOREST...
THE VIBRANT COLORS, THE ENDLESS SILENCE.


EVERYTHING,
EVERYTHING.
SLIPPING
FREE
OF
THE
ORDINARY ..

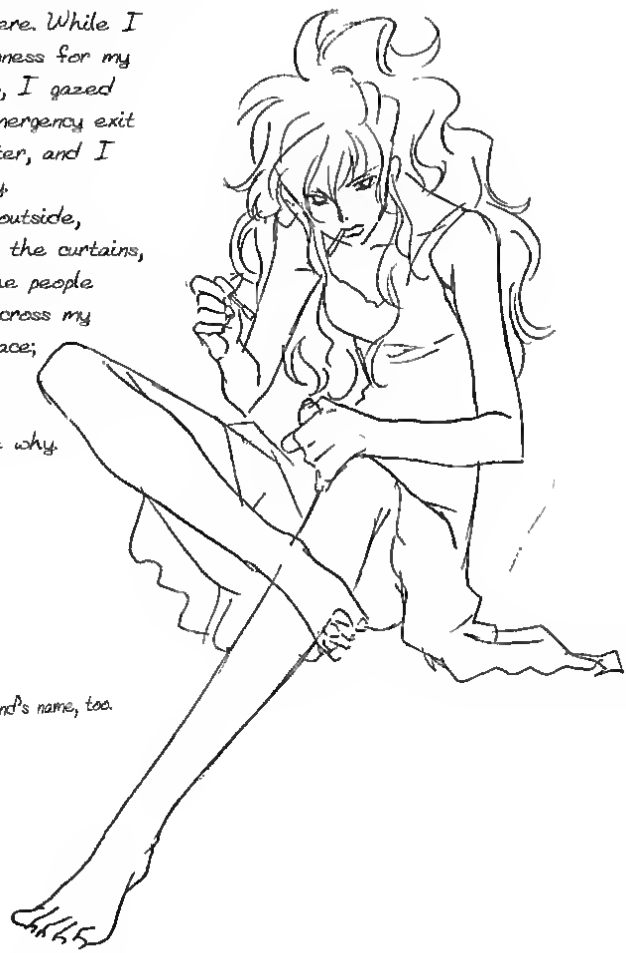
HOT
FRIGHTENING
DEEP
DARK
BLUE
HIGH
WORTH
OVER-
LOOK-
ING
THERE'S
NOT
ONE
THING
YOU'LL
REALIZE
IT,
I
KNOW

Pretty Bee.END

Pretty Bee . 1994.

This ran in a supplemental magazine called "Ten Carat". Long story short, it was a seriously large volume, so the manuscript was hardly cut at all; I remember being embarrassed at how messy the finished story was. Reading through it again now, it's loaded with opportunities for me to pick on how I used to draw...

One time, when my friend got dead drunk and couldn't go home, the very nice lady who owned the bar let us stay there. While I waited in the dimness for my friend to wake up, I gazed absently at the emergency exit sign over the counter, and I made up this story.
When it got light outside, through the gap in the curtains, the shadows of the people walking past fell across my friend's sleeping face; a vaguely happy memory, although I'm not quite sure why.

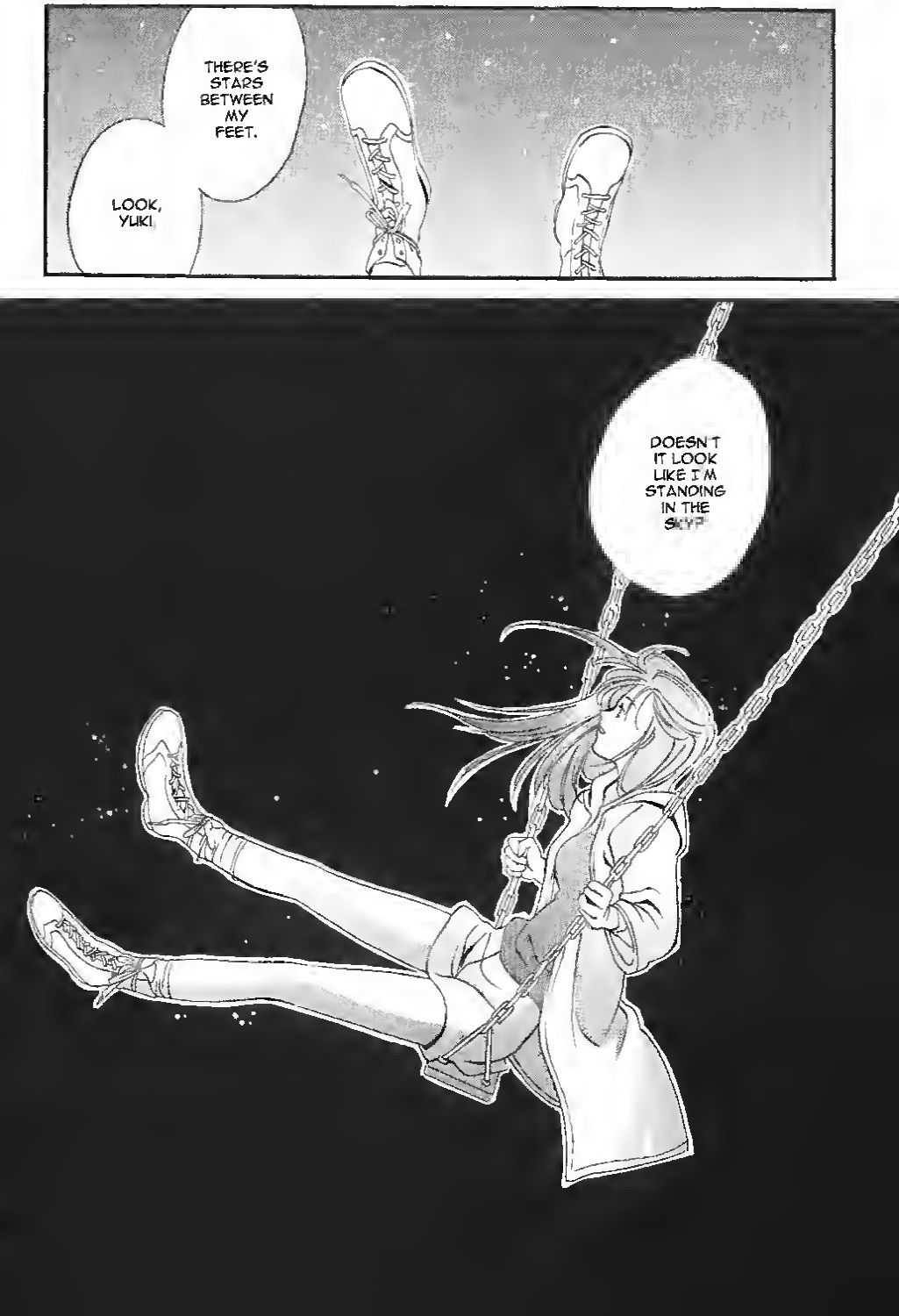


"Yuri" is my friend's name, too.

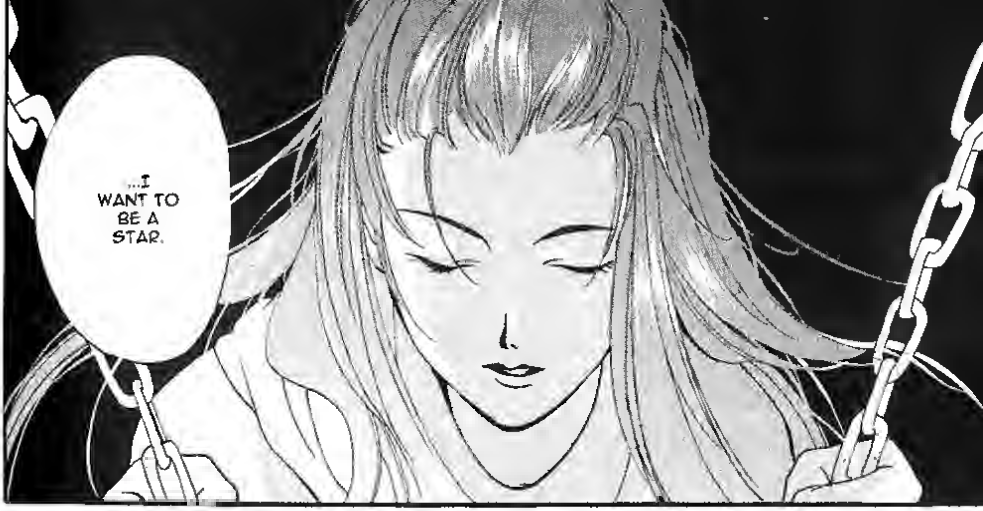
(*Hee hee. Do the math here, 20 is legal drinking age in Japan. And Ozaki-sensei is----? XD)

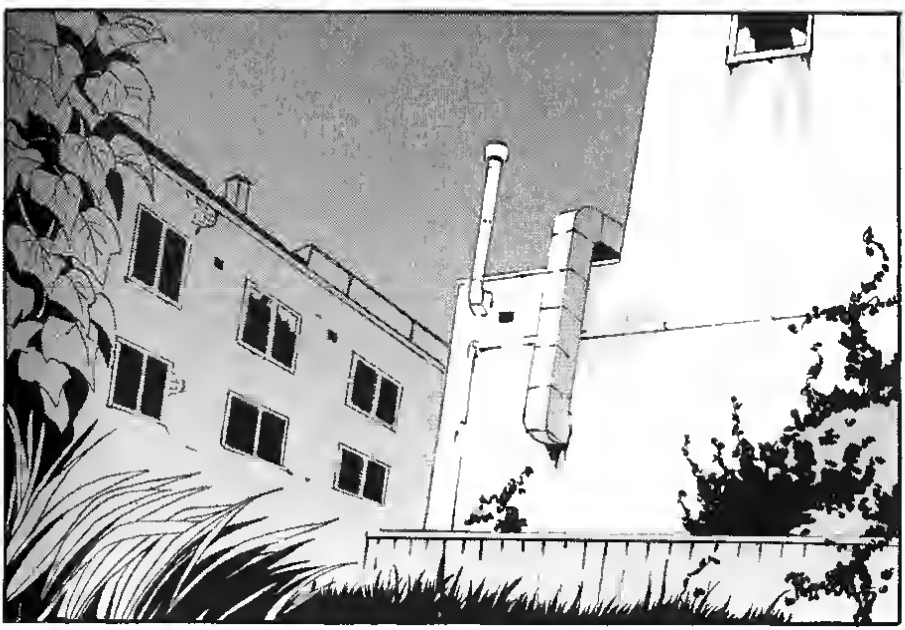
I TRIED TAKING DETOURS, OVER AND OVER
EVEN THEN, I COULDN'T FIND THE EXIT.
IF THERE'S NO PLACE FOR ME TO GO HOME TO, THEN
WIND
BLOW MY HEAD OFF FOR ME

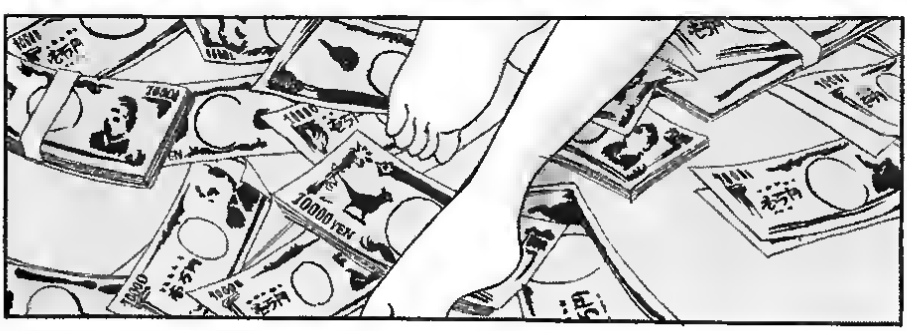
Butter knife


THERE'S STARS BETWEEN MY FEET.
LOOK, YUKI
DOESN'T IT LOOK LIKE I'M STANDING IN THE SKY?

MY GRANDMA SAID YOU WOULD, BUT...
I WONDER IF YOU BECOME A STAR WHEN YOU DIE.
...I WONDER HOW YOU GET TO BE ONE?
THE NEWSPAPER REPORTERS WILL BE SCRIBBLING OUR NAMES ALL OVER THE PLACE RIGHT ABOUT NOW
...LET'S HURRY UP AND GO, NANA


...I WANT TO BE A STAR.




10000 YEN

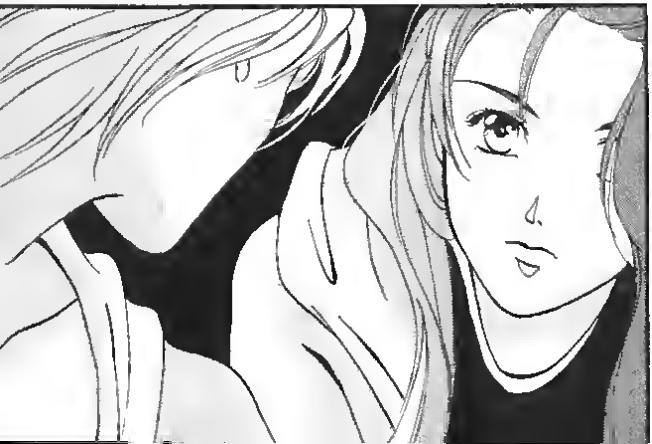
...S'COLD.

I'LL CATCH A COLD
YUKI, IF YOU'RE GONNA TAKE 'EM OFF, PUT 'EM BACK ON, WILL YA?
HEY! GEEZ~~
—WHERE IS THIS?
YOU DON'T REMEMBER?
I DUNNO
SOME ABANDONED BUILDING

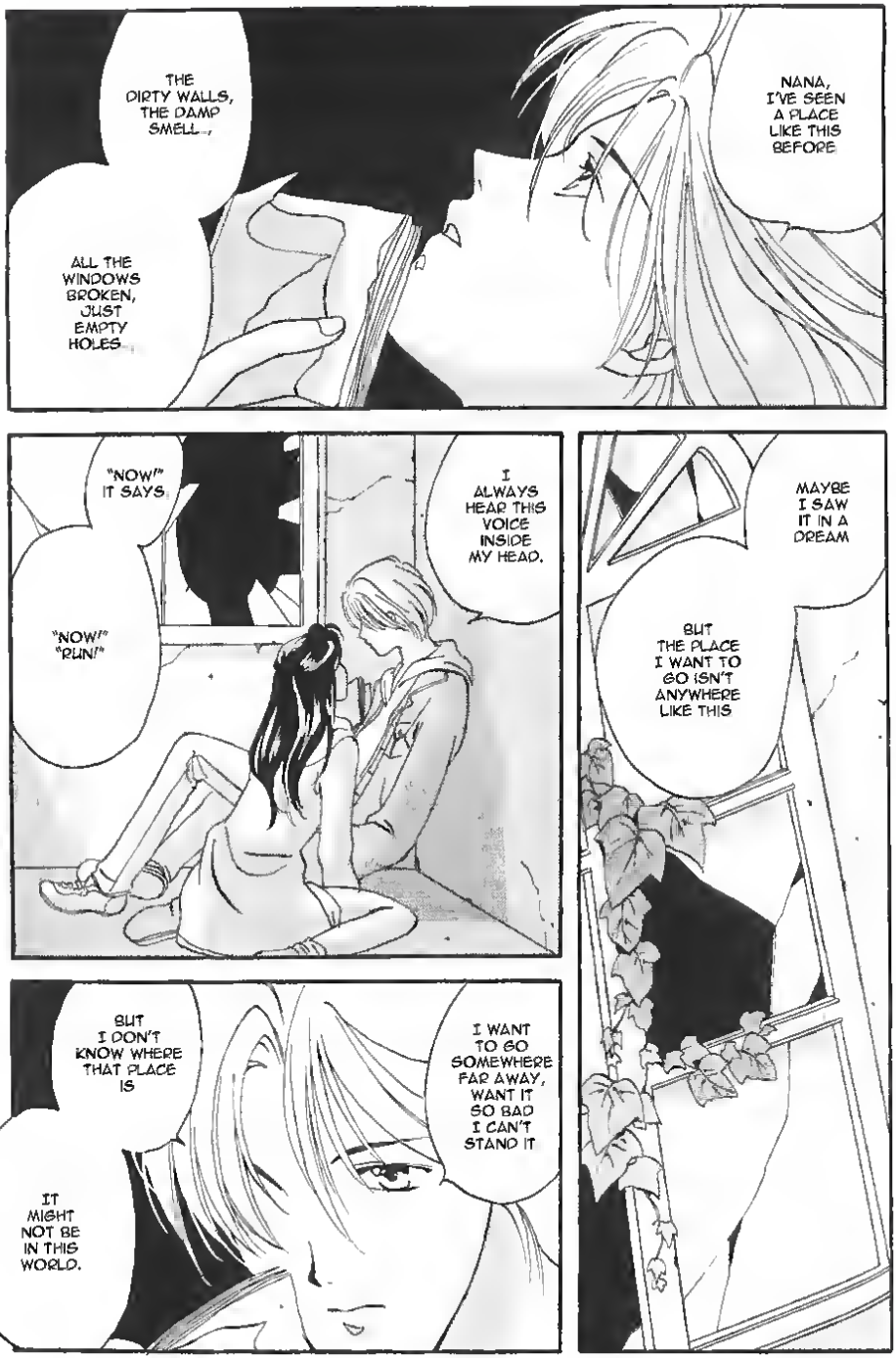
SAID YOU WANTED TO BECOME A STAR, YOU KNOW...
THAT'D BE 'CAUSE YOU WERE DRUNK

LIKE ROBBER-NOVELISTS EXIST?
WELL, I WANT TO BE A NOVELIST.

YOU DID
I WOULDN'T SAY ANYTHING THAT WEIRD.



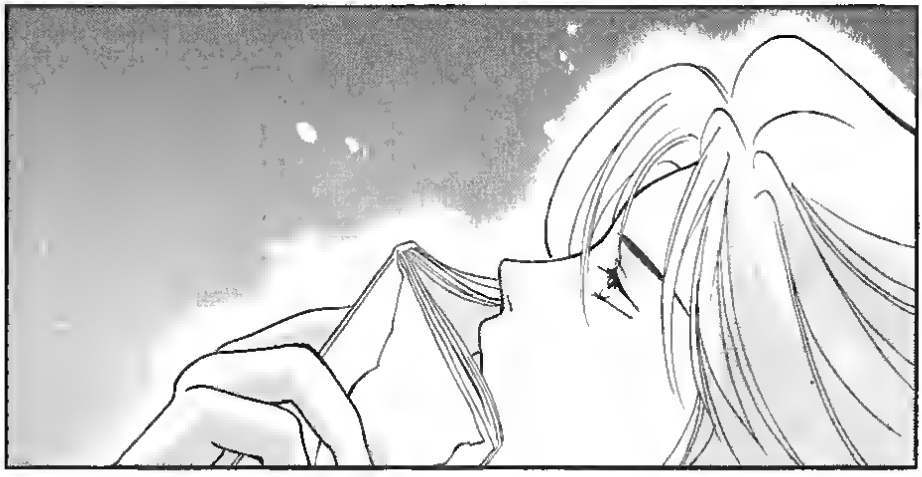
THE PARTS THAT ARE TOUCHING ARE HOT, YOU KNOW?
ONLY THOSE PLACES ARE ALIVE.
WHEN WE'RE DOING THIS
I REMEMBER I'M ALIVE
EVERYTHING ELSE IS ALMOST LIKE IT'S DEAD.
THAT'S WHAT I REMEMBER.
STEALING IS REALLY, REALLY EXCITING.
WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?
I'M NOT SCARED ONE LITTLE BIT
YOU'RE SHAKING.


NANA, I'VE SEEN A PLACE LIKE THIS BEFORE
THE DIRTY WALLS, THE DAMP SMELL...
ALL THE WINDOWS BROKEN, JUST EMPTY HOLES...
I ALWAYS HEAR THIS VOICE INSIDE MY HEAD.
"NOW!" IT SAYS.
"NOW!" "RUN!"
MAYBE I SAW IT IN A DREAM
BUT THE PLACE I WANT TO GO ISN'T ANYWHERE LIKE THIS
I WANT TO GO SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY, WANT IT SO BAD I CAN'T STAND IT
BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE THAT PLACE IS
IT MIGHT NOT BE IN THIS WORLD.

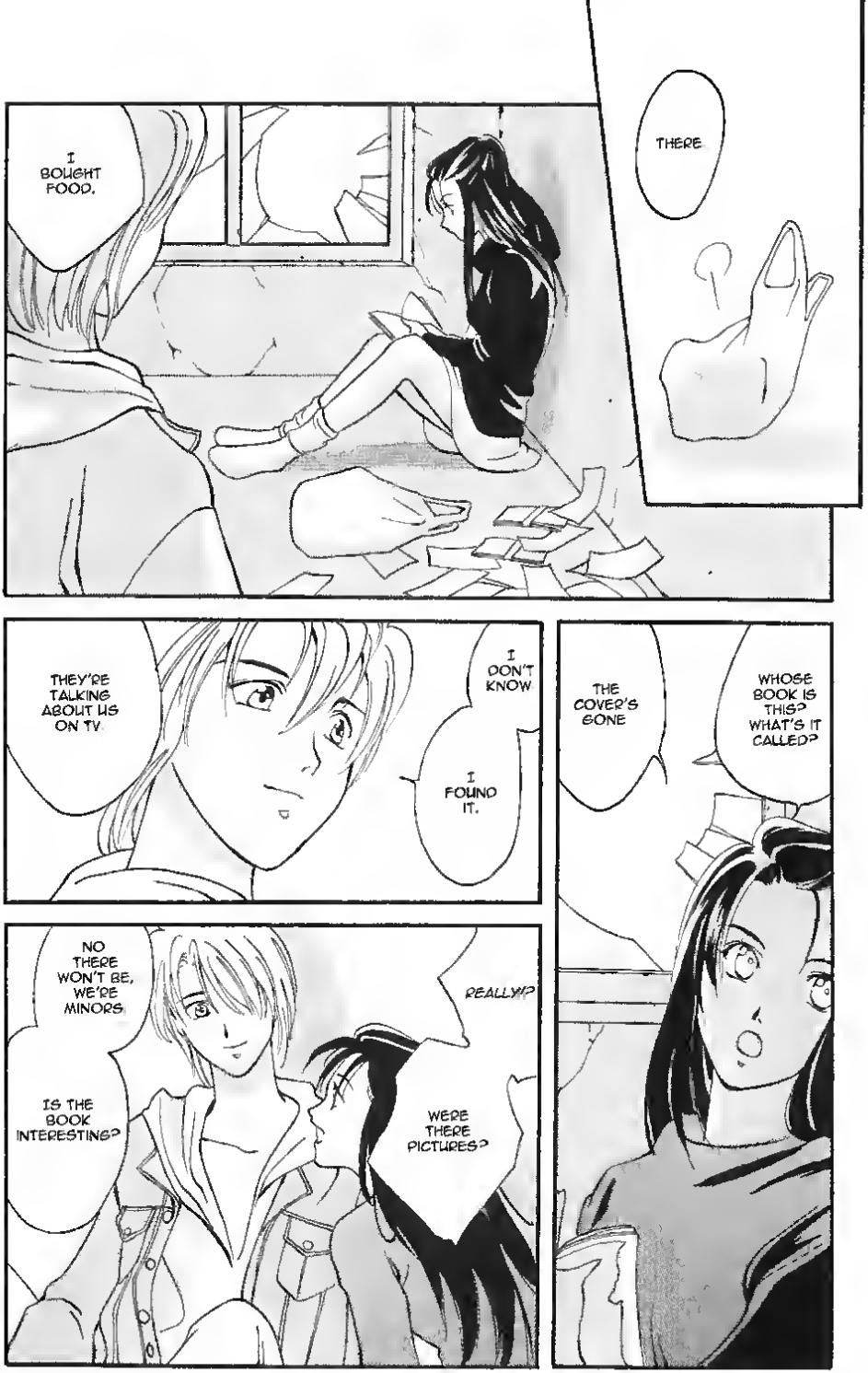
NO MATTER HOW MUCH MONEY WE GET...
EVEN IF YOU WERE THROWN INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN...
THERE'D BE NO PLACE FOR YOU TO SINK TO REST

THAT'S RIGHT, YUKI.
THERE'S NO PLACE THAT WILL SET YOUR MIND AT EASE, NO MATTER HOW FAR YOU GO NOT FOR A GUY LIKE YOU.

I MEAN, YOU'RE ALMOST LIKE AN ALIEN
ALWAYS LOOKING FOR STUFF THAT DOESN'T EXIST ON EARTH



HILL
A CAR WHICH THEY SEEM TO HAVE USED IN THEIR GETAWAY WAS FOUND NEAR A PARK---
THE PAIR WHO ROBBED THE BANK LAST NIGHT ARE STILL---


I BOUGHT FOOD.
THERE
THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT US ON TV.
I DON'T KNOW
I FOUND IT.
THE COVER'S GONE
WHOSE BOOK IS THIS? WHAT'S IT CALLED?
NO THERE WON'T BE, WE'RE MINORS.
IS THE BOOK INTERESTING?
REALLY!?
WERE THERE PICTURES?

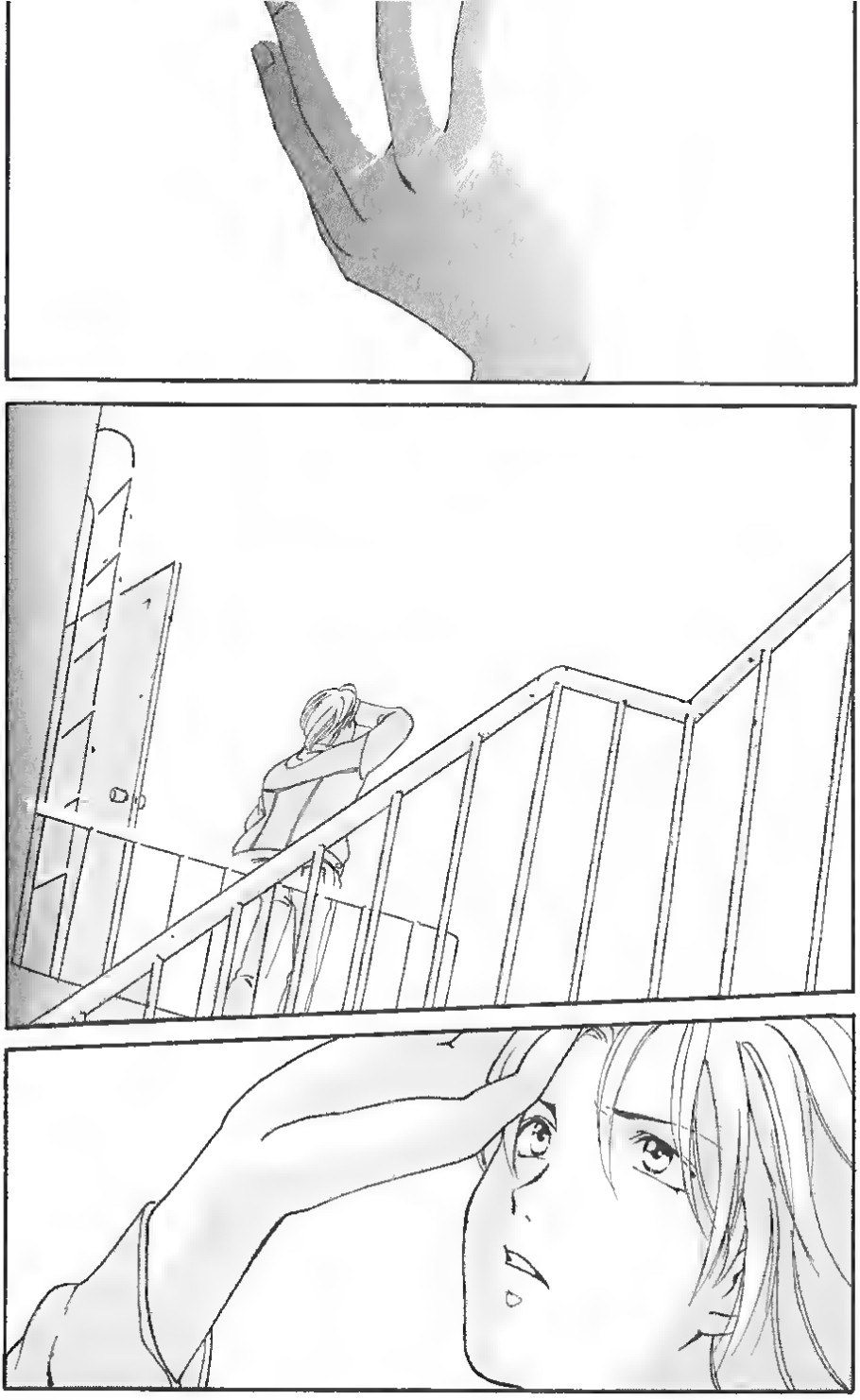
I HAVEN'T READ MUCH OF IT YET.
YOU READ IT, DIDN'T YOU YUKI?
NOPE
IT'S ABOUT WAKING UP ONE MORNING AND BEING A BUG.
OH, KAFKA'S "METAMOR-PHOSIS".
I HAD TO WRITE AN ESSAY ON IT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL
IT WAS NIGHTTIME, TOO DARK.
I JUST HAD IT OPEN.
WHAT SORT OF STORY IS IT?
IT'S A WEIRD STORY, HUH
I WISH I'D BEEN BORN A BUG
A DUNG BEETLE?
ANY KIND OF BUG.
SOMETHING WITH NO BRAINS AT ALL.
BET I WOULDN'T THINK ABOUT WANTING TO GO SOMEWHERE THEN

THEIR OWN LEGS, MOVING UNDER THEM, PURELY BY REFLEX
I DON'T THINK THEY EVEN NOTICE 'EM
MOVING THINGS AND IMMOBILE ONES
THEIR TWO EYES, SEEING NOTHING BUT LIGHT AND DARKNESS
YUKI, I THINK THAT'S CALLED JUST BEING NATURAL
NO MATTER WHERE THEY ARE, THEY'RE NEVER DISSATISFIED WITH IT.
GRASS AND TREES AND FLOWERS AND BUGS AND WATER AND
NONE OF THEM THINK OF GOING SOMEWHERE E

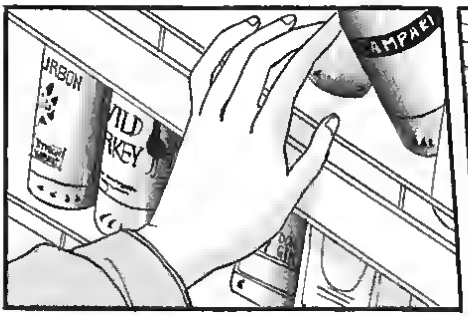
..THEN I'M NOT NATURAL.
I'M CRAZY A REAL ALIEN

YUKI, YOU EAT BREAD, RIGHT?
YEAH, BUT... I THOUGHT YOU DID EAT BREAD
JUST LOOKING AT FOOD MAKES ME WANT TO HURL. YOU KNOW THAT.
I DON'T WANT ANY.
I CAN'T EAT BREAD OR VEGETABLES, NOT LATELY.
WELL..
YOU'LL DIE IF YOU DON'T EAT ANYTHING.
OH, HEY--, THERE'S NO BUTTER

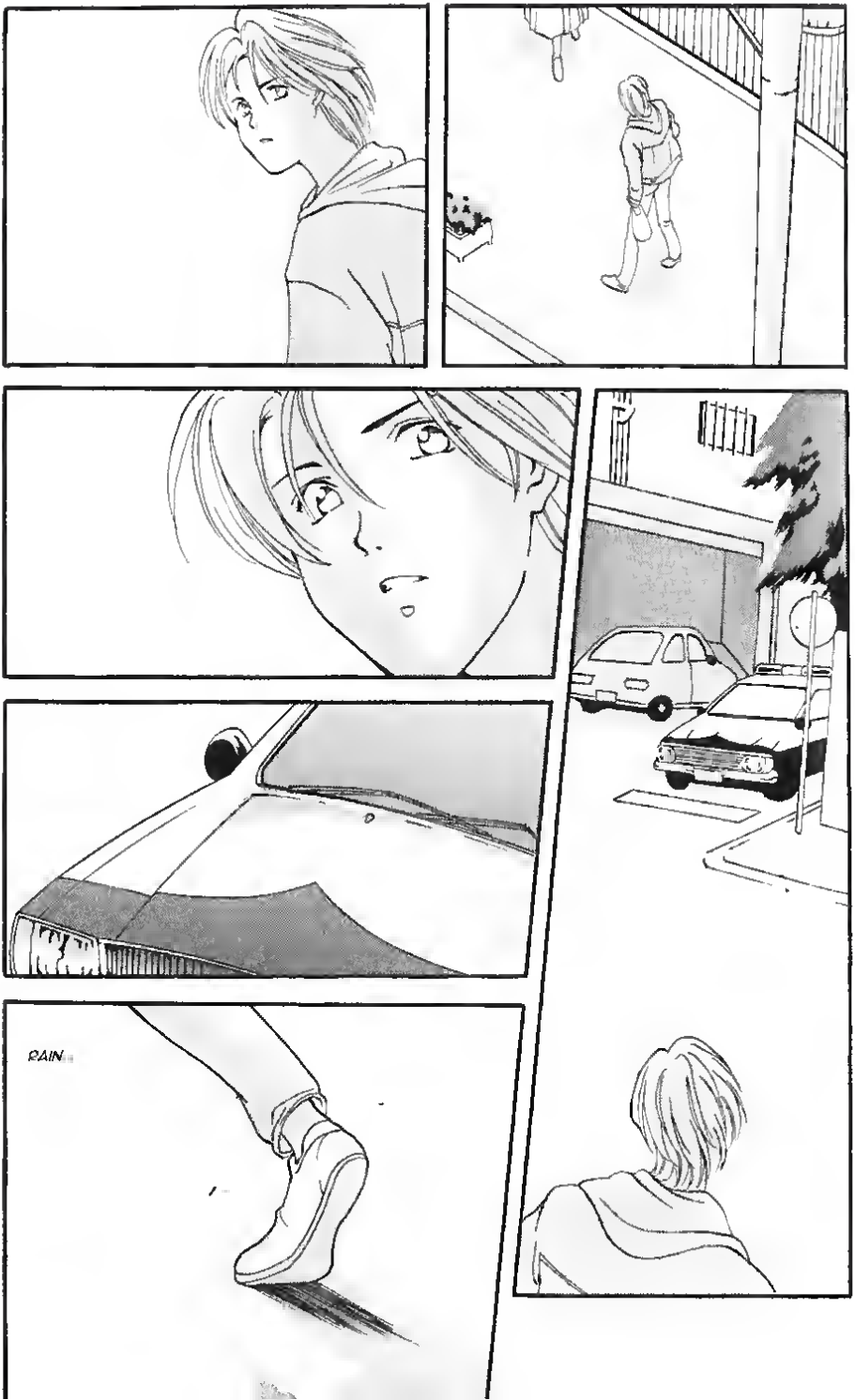
THERE'S NO WAY I'M EATING THIS WITHOUT BUTTER GO BUY SOME
NANA
NO I CAN'T! IT'S JUST PLAIN WHITE BREAD
YUKI, I CAN'T EAT THIS WITHOUT BUTTER
YOU CAN SO
BUT THROWING UP FEELS GOOD EVEN IF IT HURTS
NANA
I DON'T FEEL GOOD PLEASE
I'VE LOST MY SHOES
I DON'T WANT TO GO
NANA
IT'S WEIRD I CAN'T SEE SO WELL.
YOU'RE A GUY, SO I BET YOU'LL GET A WOODY OFF OF IT.
C'MON, HURRY UP AND GO BUY IT.



WELCOME


JACK
WILD
TURKEY

ALMOST AS THOUGH I REALLY HAVE BECOME A BUG
THE THIEVES ARE ON THE RUN INSIDE CITY LIMITS
bip
WHITE...
GLARING...
A YOUNG MAN AND WOMAN
THEIR IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS ARE---
LIKE GLASS
SOAKS UP THE COLOR FROM THE SKY...
REFLECTS IT ON ITS BODY...
A LITTLE ROUND BUG

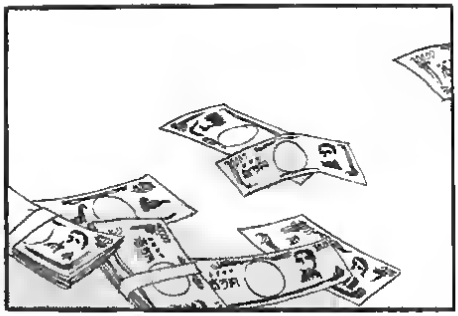

RAIN

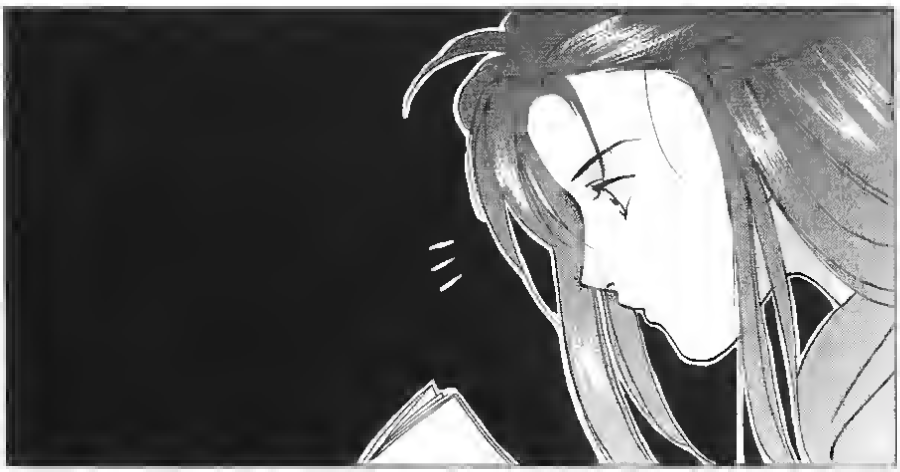
IF IT WOULD ONLY RAIN...
WOULD HIDE ME, I KNOW...
RUSTLE
THE KIND RAIN..
TTT

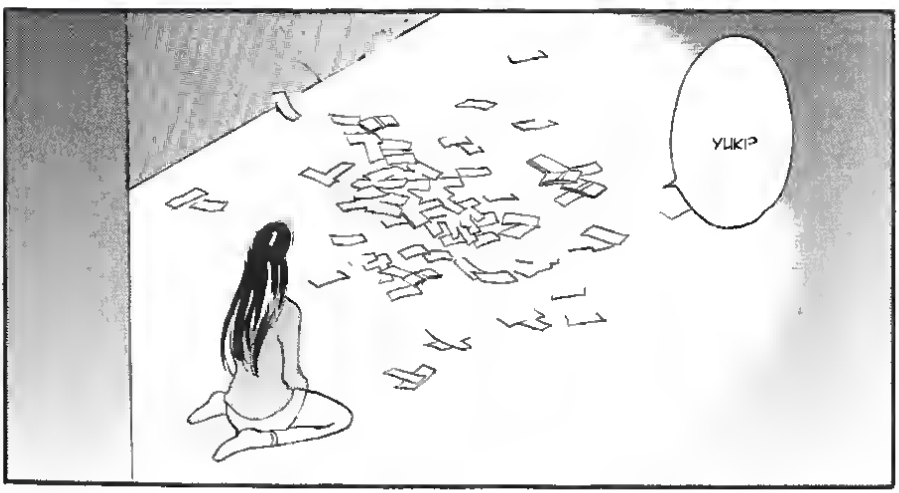
WILL YOU BLOW MY HEAD...
OR, WIND
...TO POWDER?

I'LL FLY APART, RIDING ON THE WIND...
IF YOU DO...
I'LL BE ABLE TO GO TO THE PLACE I SAW IN MY DREAMS.
I'LL BE ABLE TO GO ANYWHERE
ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD
I'LL EVEN BE ABLE TO BECOME A STAR

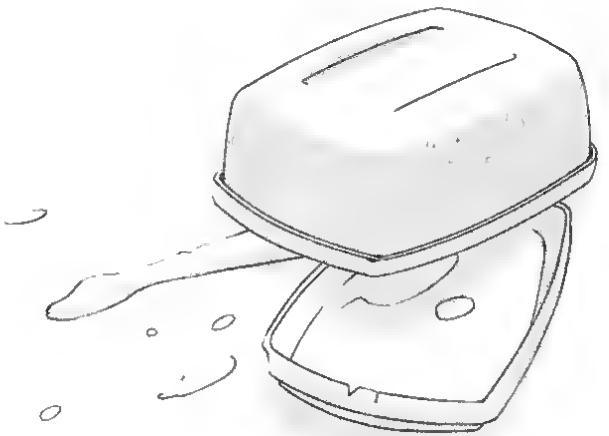
YOU CAN BECOME A STAR







YUKI?



Butter Knife.END

Butter knife. 1994.

I remember taking my first-ever reference photos for this story. I went out to a department store that had been abandoned and took several black-and-white pictures. I can't be the only person whose heart dances, somehow, when faced with ruins. Although you don't see that many good ones around...

And here's Osaki, at this point in time, still not knowing that a thing called "perspective" exists in this world.

...That can't be okay, can it?

I think I'd actually planned for them to be (big) brother and (little) sister... Maybe I didn't...

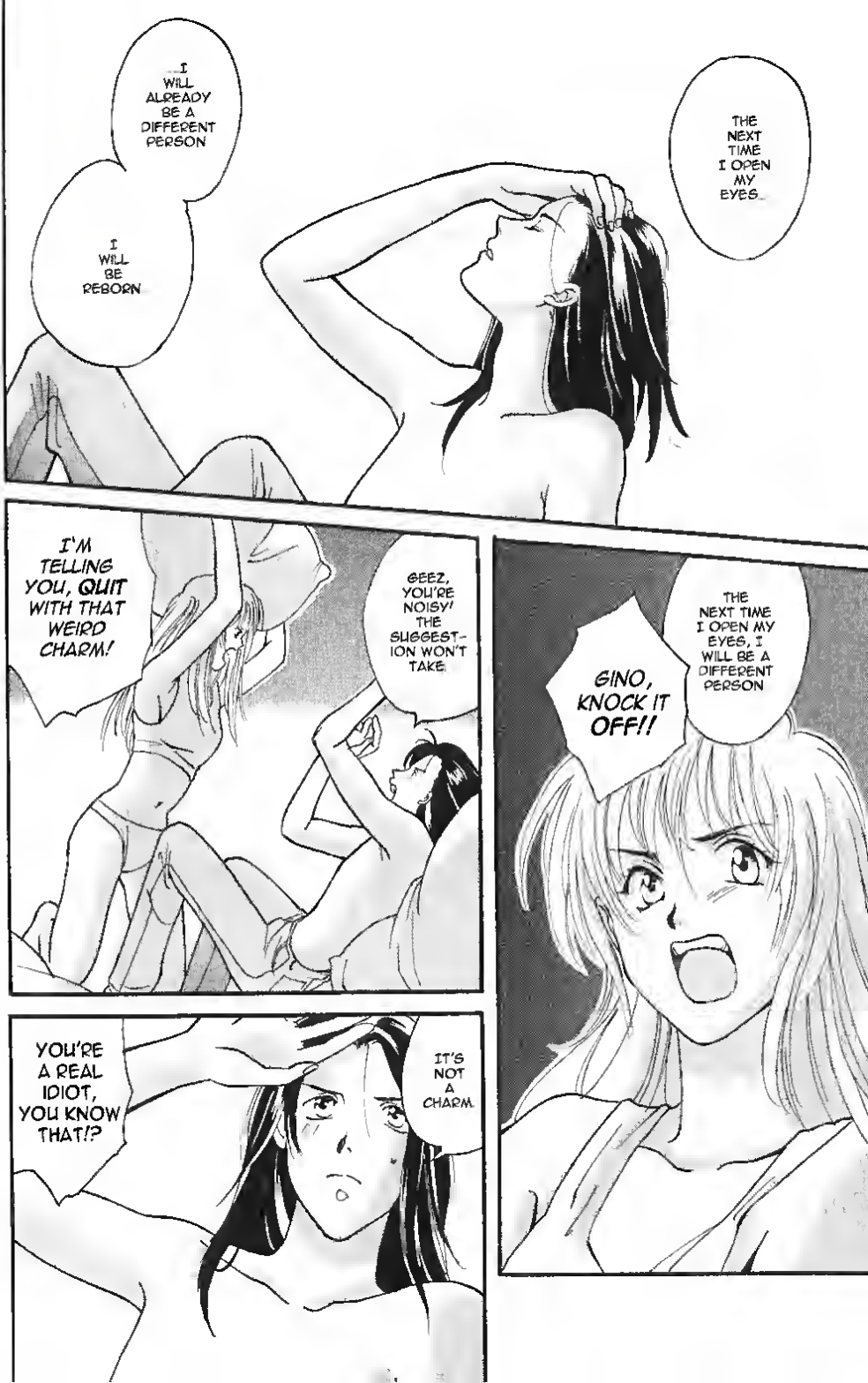
Honeymoon. 1995.

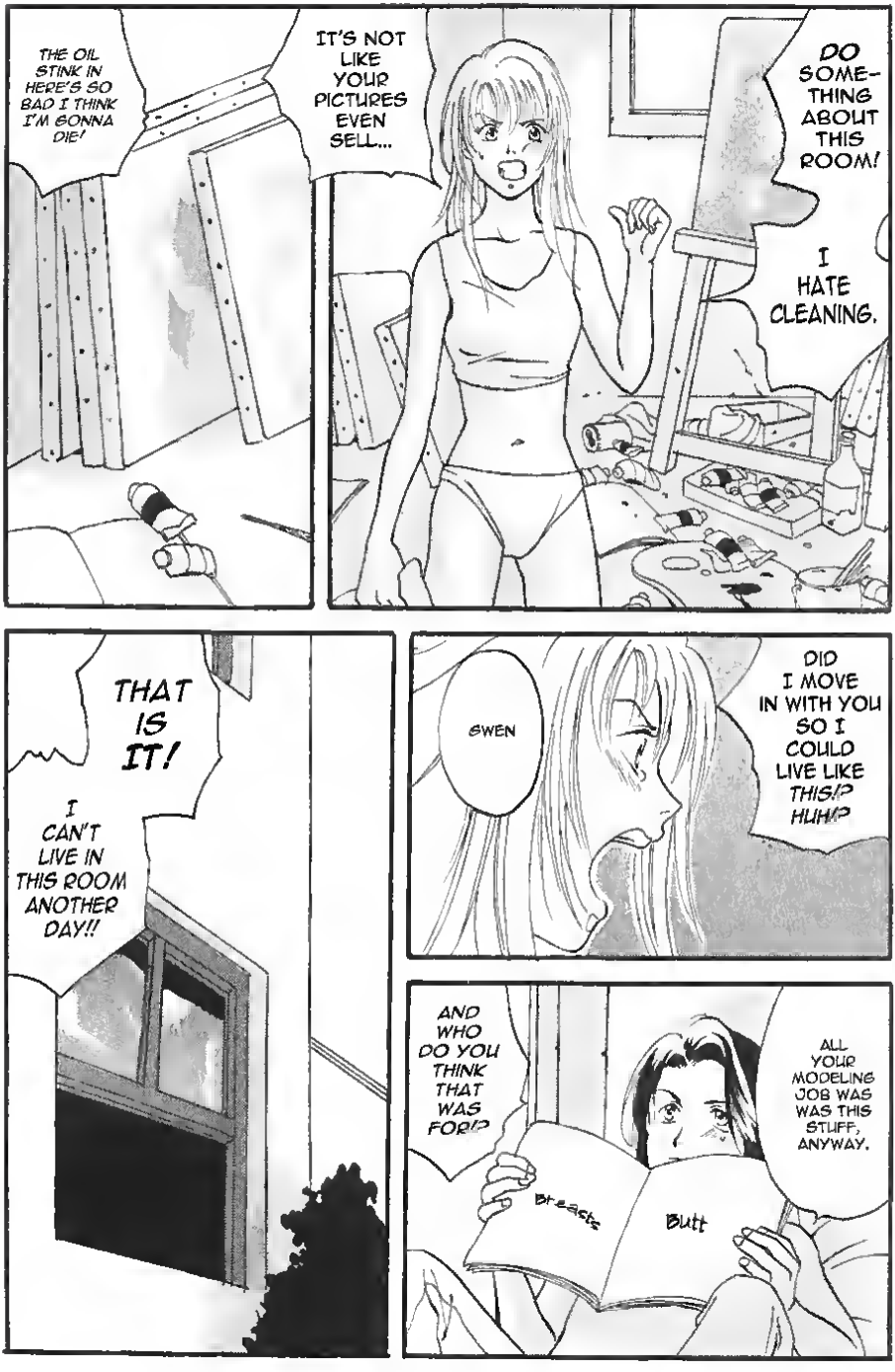
...My last work at this point, as far as short stories go. I think this was still a little before I turned 19. After this story, I didn't draw a thing for about a year (until I got my first serialization). Come to think of it, this work might've been a turning point of sorts. You can finally see, just a little bit, that atmosphere of getting through death and living on the other side. Although it's in no way a happy ending...

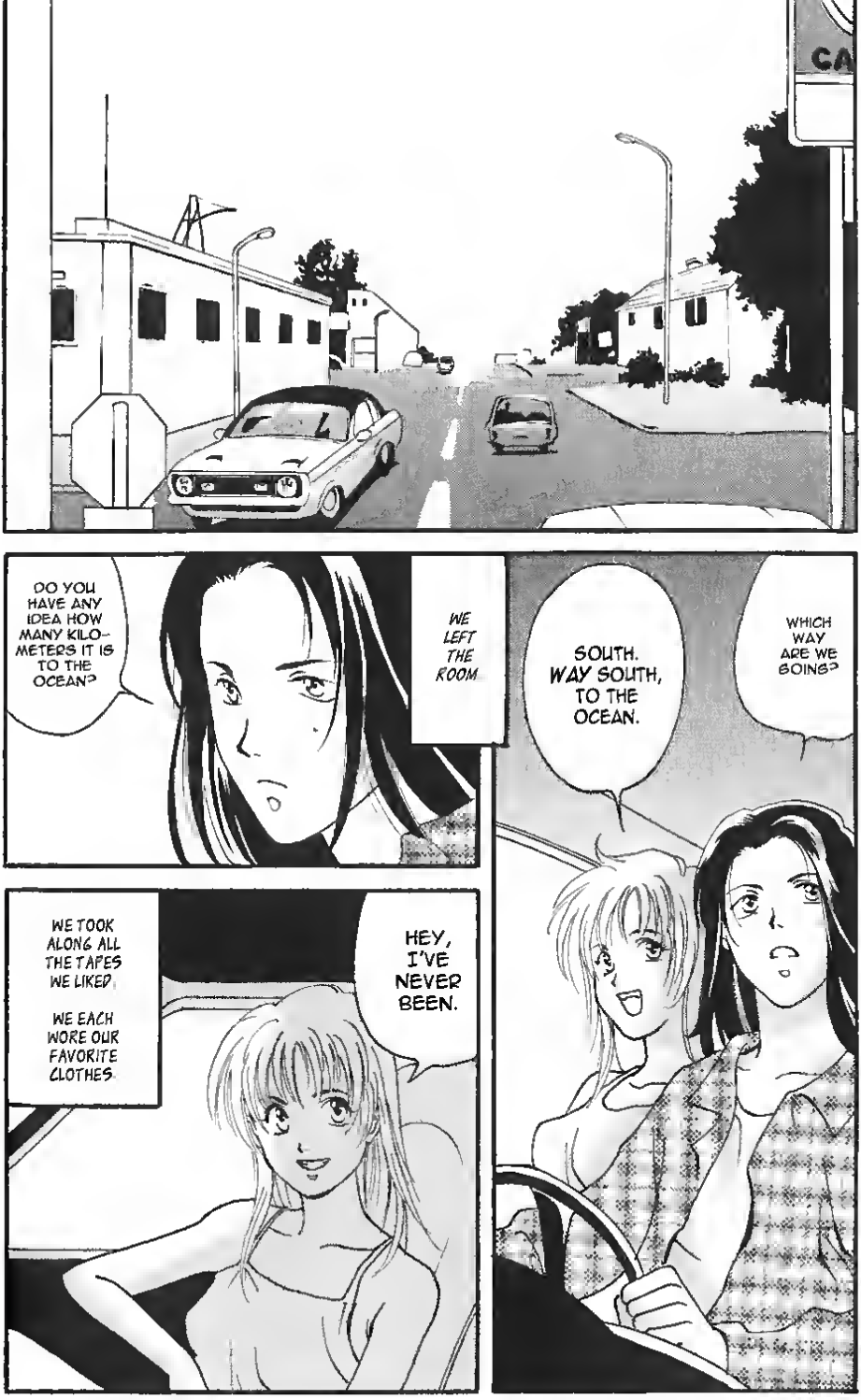
This also marks the end of my seemingly eternal teenage years.

The idiot-couple, frolicking at Disneyland.

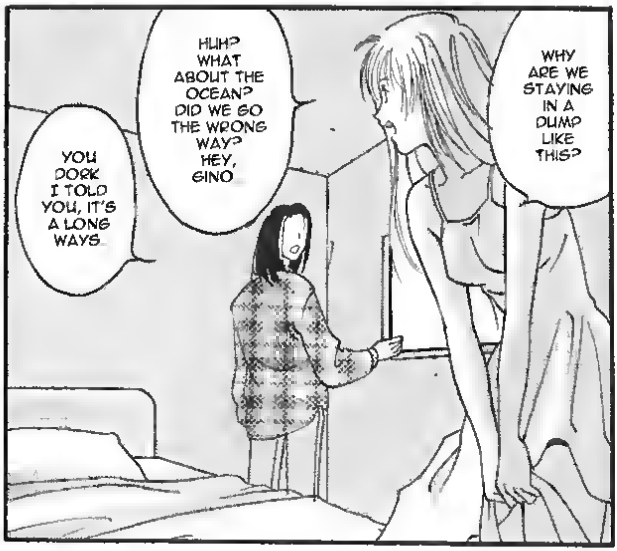
Honeymoon

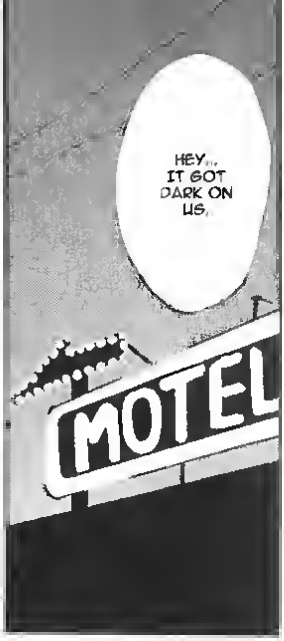

I WILL ALREADY BE A DIFFERENT PERSON
I WILL BE REBORN
THE NEXT TIME I OPEN MY EYES...
I'M TELLING YOU, QUIT WITH THAT WEIRD CHARM!
GEEZ, YOU'RE NOISY! THE SUGGEST-ION WON'T TAKE.
GINO, KNOCK IT OFF!!
THE NEXT TIME I OPEN MY EYES, I WILL BE A DIFFERENT PERSON
YOU'RE A REAL IDIOT, YOU KNOW THAT!?
IT'S NOT A CHARM.

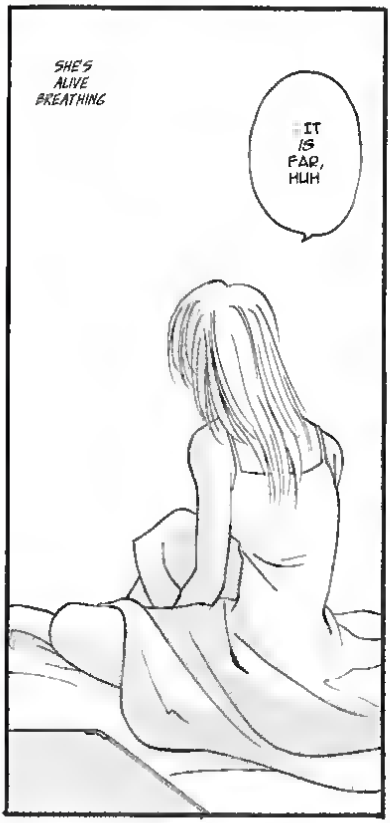

THE OIL STINK IN HERE'S SO BAD I THINK I'M GONNA DIE!
IT'S NOT LIKE YOUR PICTURES EVEN SELL...
DO SOME-THING ABOUT THIS ROOM!
I HATE CLEANING.
THAT IS IT!
I CAN'T LIVE IN THIS ROOM ANOTHER DAY!!
SWEN
DID I MOVE IN WITH YOU SO I COULD LIVE LIKE THIS!? HUH!?
AND WHO DO YOU THINK THAT WAS FOR!?
Breasts
Butt
ALL YOUR MODELING JOB WAS WAS THIS STUFF, ANYWAY.

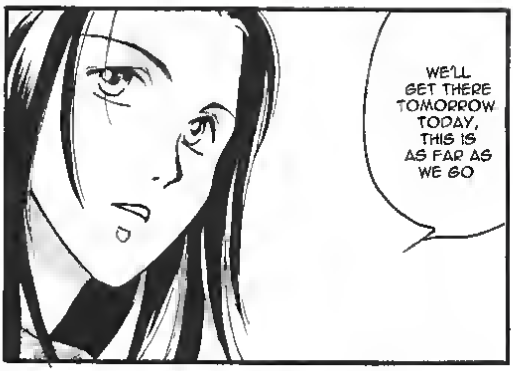

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MANY KILO-METERS IT IS TO THE OCEAN?
WE LEFT THE ROOM.
SOUTH. WAY SOUTH, TO THE OCEAN.
WHICH WAY ARE WE GOING?
WE TOOK ALONG ALL THE TAPES WE LIKED.
WE EACH WORE OUR FAVORITE CLOTHES.
HEY, I'VE NEVER BEEN.

THE PAINT SMELL IN YOUR ROOM WAS SO STRONG, MY EARS WOULDN'T STOP RINGING
FRESH, NEW AIR...
IT FEELS GREAT.
I WANT TO GO SOMEPLACE REALLY HOT AND SWEAT LIKE A PIG.


YOU DORK I TOLD YOU, IT'S A LONG WAYS.
HUH? WHAT ABOUT THE OCEAN? DID WE GO THE WRONG WAY? HEY, GINO
WHY ARE WE STAYING IN A DUMP LIKE THIS?


HEY... IT GOT DARK ON US.
MOTEL

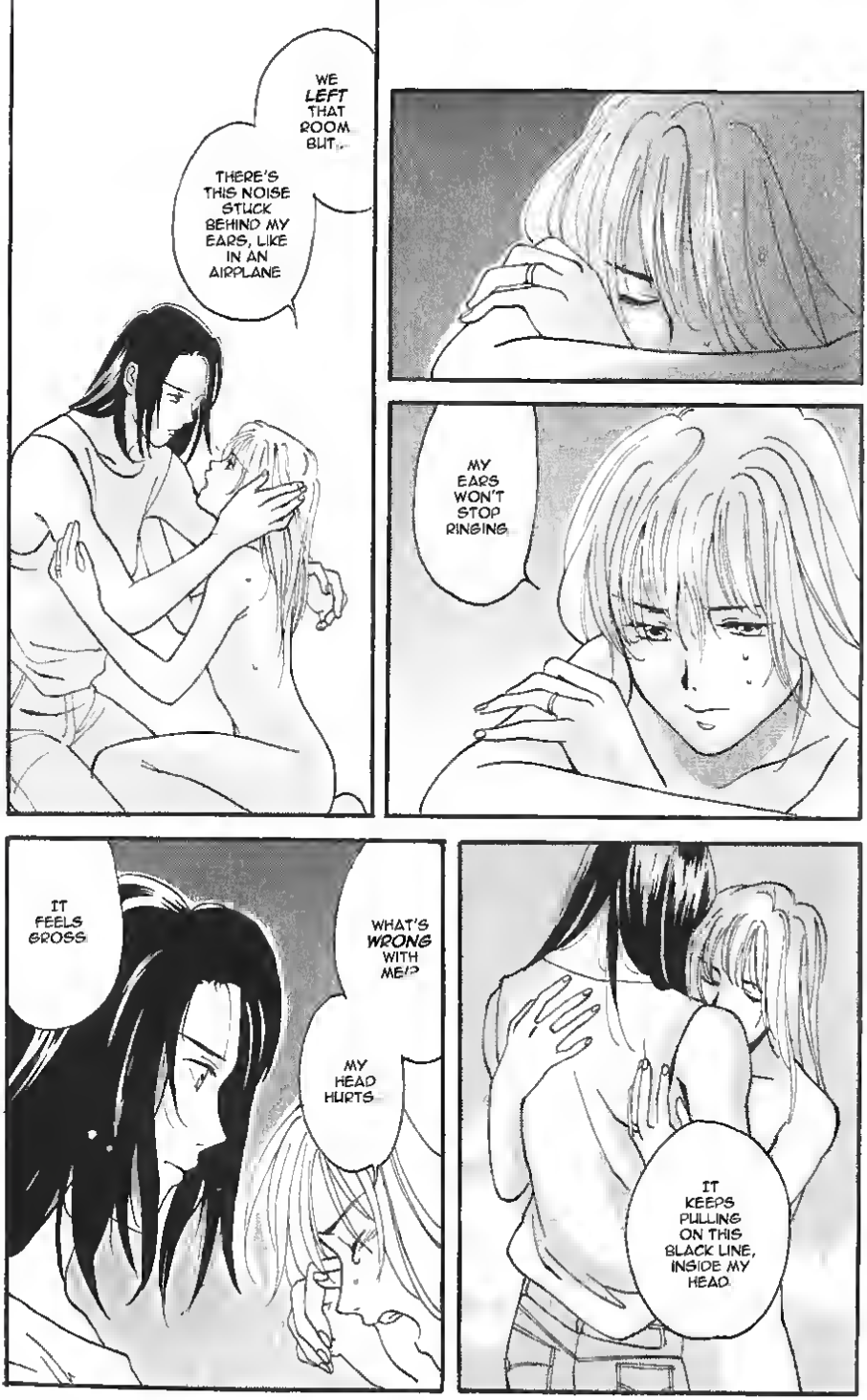

SHE'S ALIVE BREATHING
IT IS FAR, HUH

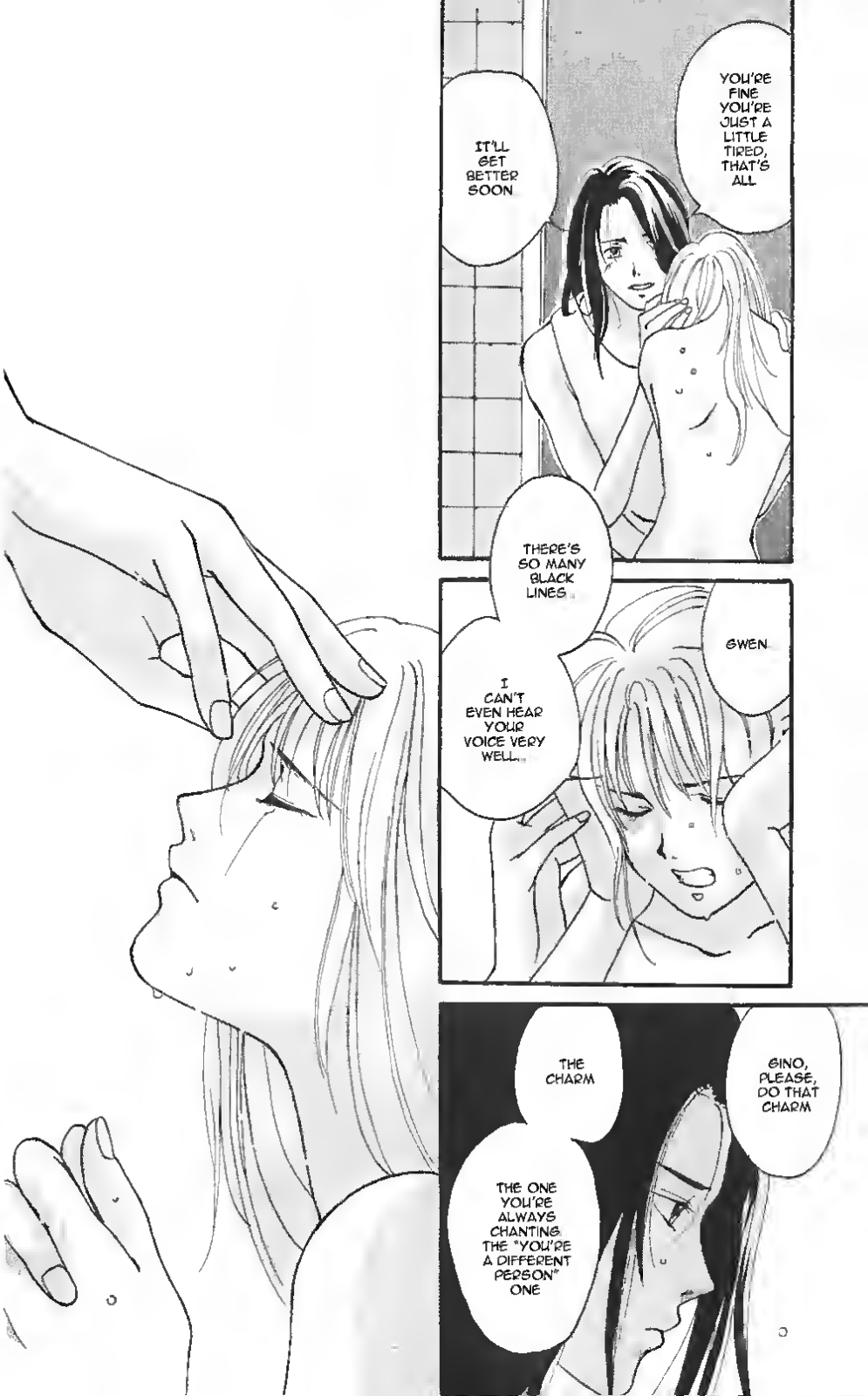

WE'LL GET THERE TOMORROW TODAY, THIS IS AS FAR AS WE GO

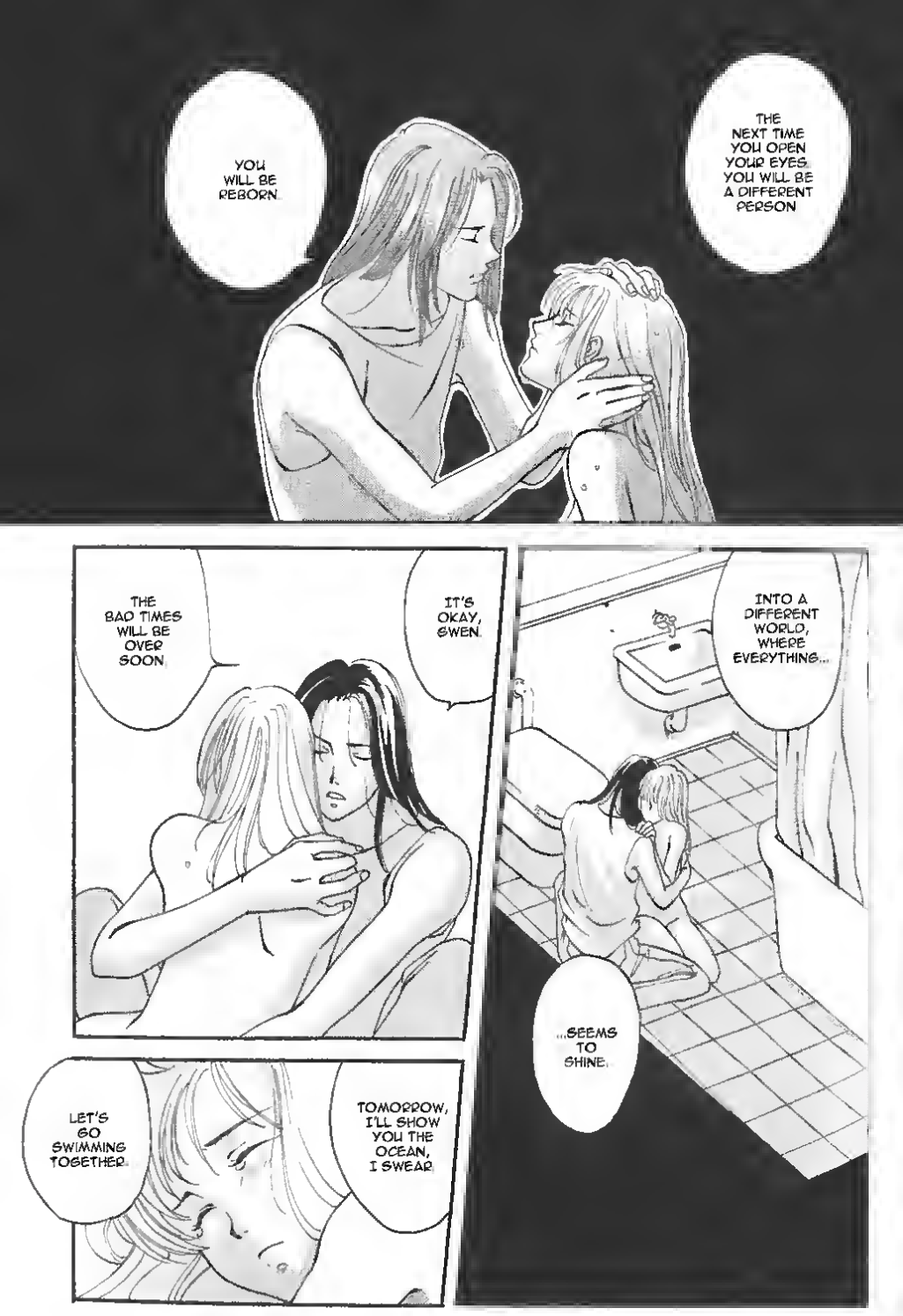
SHE'S STILL OKAY.

I'M SORRY, BUT I'M AFRAID SHE'S...
SHE MAY LIVE ANOTHER SIX MONTHS..
NO, WELL..
EVEN SO, IF SHE'S HOSPITALIZED AND TREAT-MENT IS CONTINUED, SHE MAY...
LET'S GET MARRIED, GWEN
LET'S MARRY..

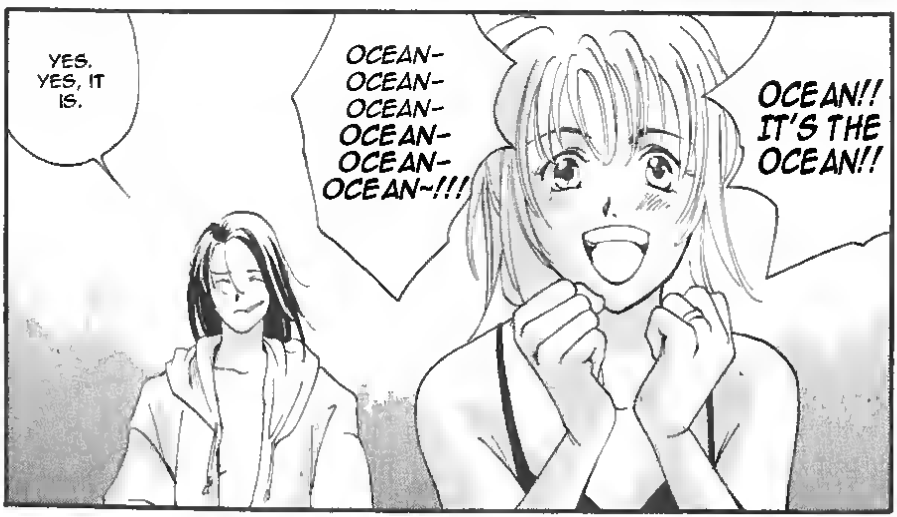
GWEN...
GWEN?


WE LEFT THAT ROOM BUT...
THERE'S THIS NOISE STUCK BEHIND MY EARS, LIKE IN AN AIRPLANE
MY EARS WON'T STOP RINGING
IT FEELS GROSS
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME!?
MY HEAD HURTS
IT KEEPS PULLING ON THIS BLACK LINE, INSIDE MY HEAD


YOU'RE FINE YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE TIRED, THAT'S ALL
IT'LL GET BETTER SOON
THERE'S SO MANY BLACK LINES
I CAN'T EVEN HEAR YOUR VOICE VERY WELL
GWEN
GINO, PLEASE, DO THAT CHARM
THE CHARM
THE ONE YOU'RE ALWAYS CHANTING THE "YOU'RE A DIFFERENT PERSON" ONE

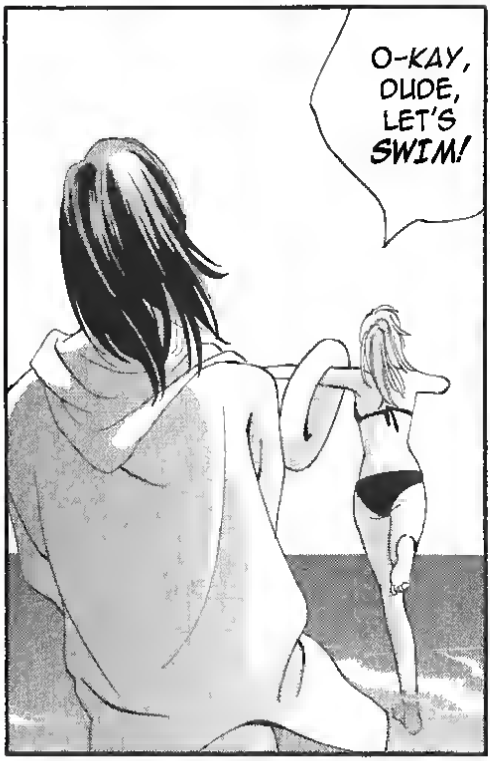

YOU WILL BE REBORN.
THE NEXT TIME YOU OPEN YOUR EYES, YOU WILL BE A DIFFERENT PERSON
THE BAD TIMES WILL BE OVER SOON.
IT'S OKAY, GWEN.
INTO A DIFFERENT WORLD, WHERE EVERYTHING...
...SEEMS TO SHINE.
LET'S GO SWIMMING TOGETHER.
TOMORROW, I'LL SHOW YOU THE OCEAN, I SWEAR.

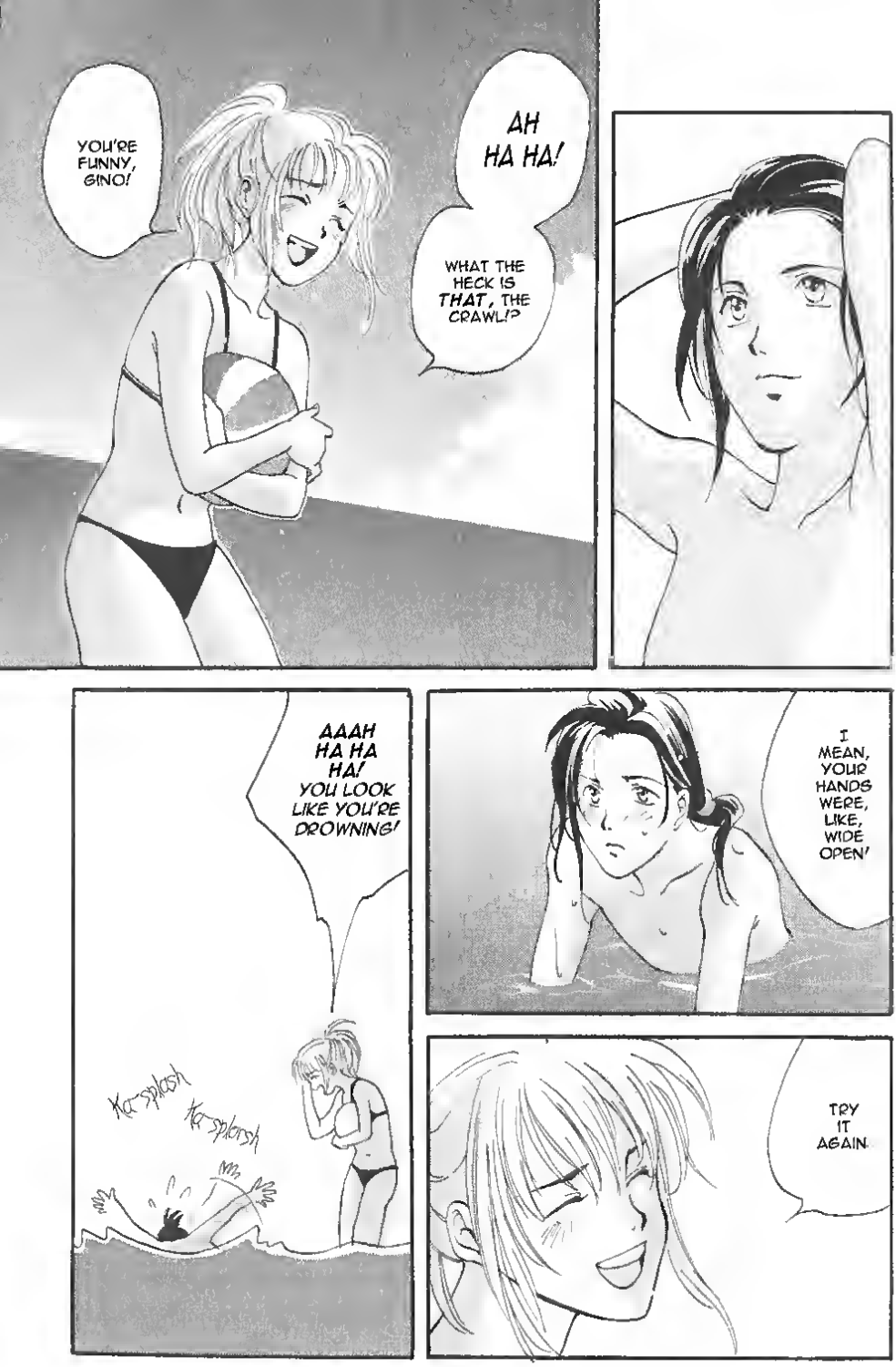
LET'S SWIM, AND GET SUNBURNED, AND DRINK BEER.
IT'S GONNA BE FUN.
GWEN KEPT HER EYES SHUT TIGHT UNTIL MORNING CAME. SHE NEVER SLEPT.
I HELD HER ALL NIGHT LONG, TRYING TO MAKE THEM GO AWAY.
GWEN WAS COVERED IN GOOSEBUMPS; WHEN I TOUCHED HER, IT WAS ROUGH, LIKE TOUCHING CONCRETE.


YES, YES, IT IS.
OCEAN- OCEAN- OCEAN- OCEAN- OCEAN- OCEAN~!!!
OCEAN!! IT'S THE OCEAN!!

I LOVE YOU!
THANK YOU, GINO!

IT'S SO COOL!!
AWE-SOME!!
IT'S HUGE!! I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS!!


O-KAY, DUDE, LET'S SWIM!


YOU'RE FUNNY, GINO!
AH HA HA!
WHAT THE HECK IS THAT, THE CRAWL!?
AAAH HA HA HA! YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'RE DROWNING!
ka-splash
ka-splash
I MEAN, YOUR HANDS WERE, LIKE, WIDE OPEN!
TRY IT AGAIN

IT'S A LIE, GWEN.

YOU, DYING...

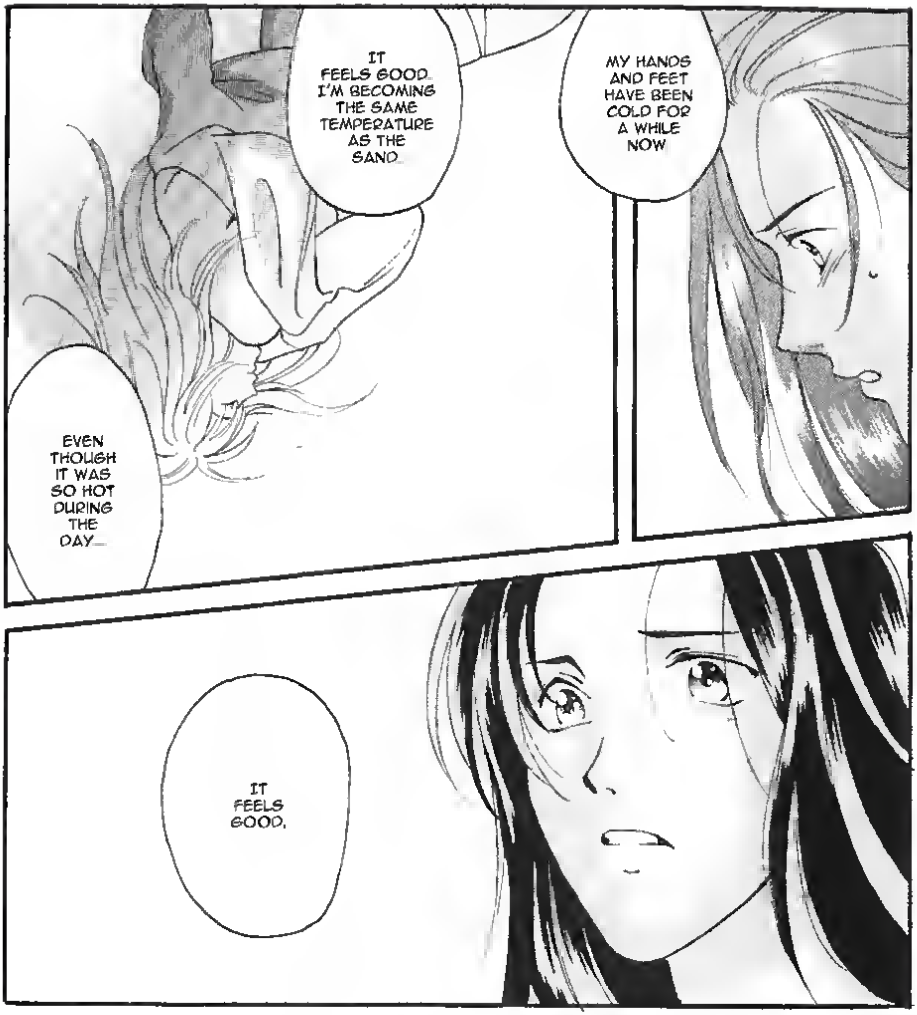
SHE SPENT ALL DAY GOOFING AROUND, NEVER ONCE CAME OUT OF THE OCEAN
I TOLD GWEN SHE'D GET SUNSTROKE, BUT SHE DIDN'T LISTEN
NO SICK PERSON HAS THIS MUCH ENERGY
...IT'S GOTTA BE A LIE

THERE'S NOBODY HERE.
YEAH.
I WONDER WHY? THE OCEAN'S SO GREAT HERE.
MAYBE THERE'S SHARKS OR SOME-THING?
COULD BE.
I WOULDN'T CARE IF THERE *WERE* SHARKS.
WHEN I DIE, I'D LIKE TO BECOME FOOD FOR A SHARK.
...OR AN ALLIGATOR, OR A WOLF, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

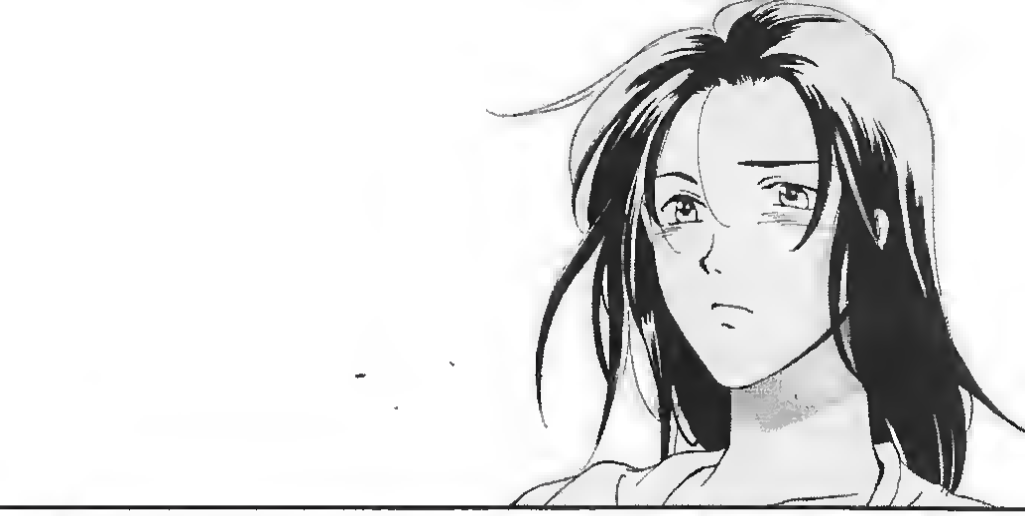
STOP. DON'T TALK LIKE THAT.
...YOU KNOW, I'D NEVER BEEN OUT OF THAT TOWN UNTIL TODAY.
IT'S NOT LIKE I EVEN LIKED THE PLACE ALL THAT MUCH.
I ALWAYS WANTED TO GO SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY

SOMEPLACE LIKE THAT.
PROBABLY THE DESERT...
OR THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN...

I'LL DIE HERE.
THIS IS A DIFFERENT WORLD.
YOUR CHARM WORKED, GINO SEE?
KILL ME, GINO.

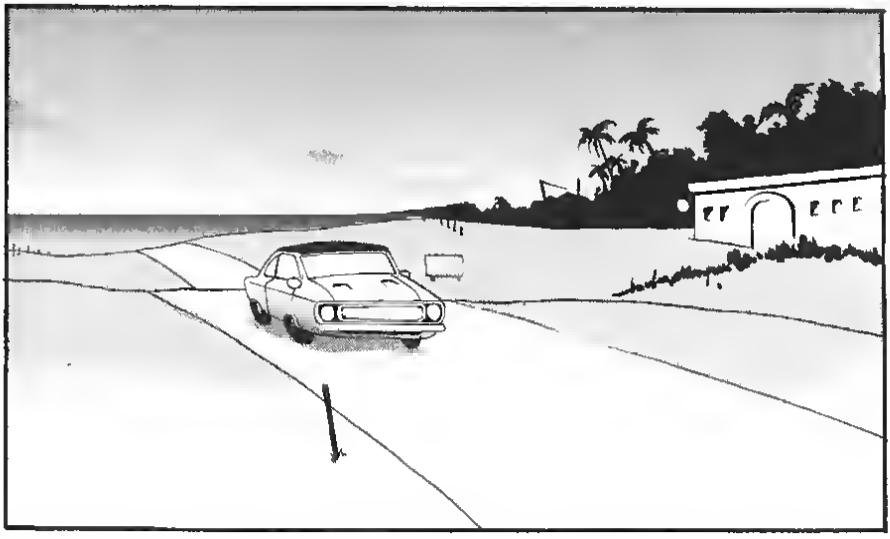

IT FEELS GOOD. I'M BECOMING THE SAME TEMPERATURE AS THE SAND.
MY HANDS AND FEET HAVE BEEN COLD FOR A WHILE NOW
EVEN THOUGH IT WAS SO HOT DURING THE DAY—
IT FEELS GOOD.

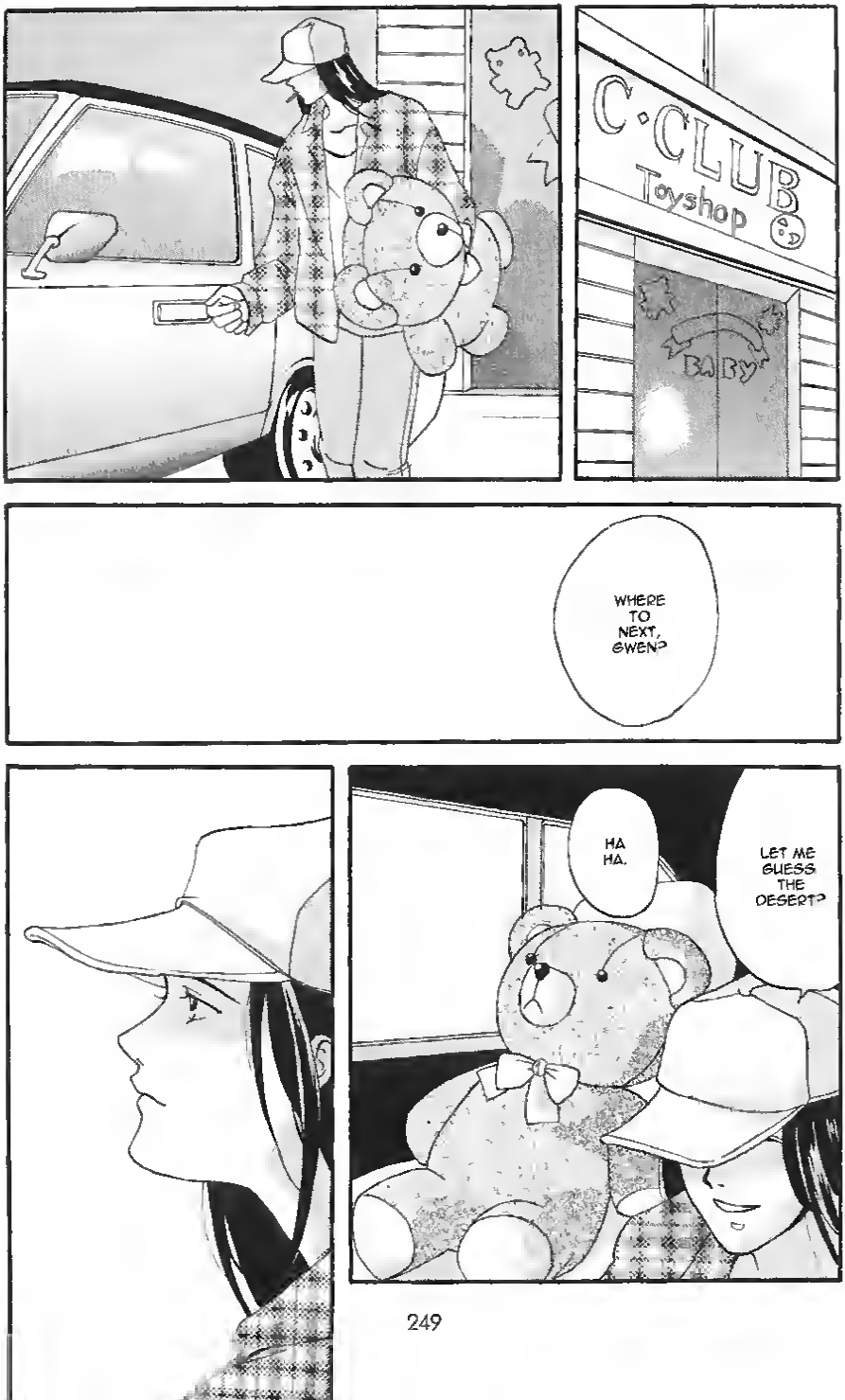
IN ONE EVENING,
GWEN'S LIFE
VANISHED.



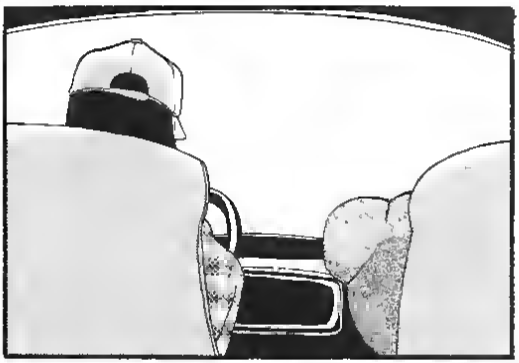
I THREW HER BODY INTO THE OCEAN

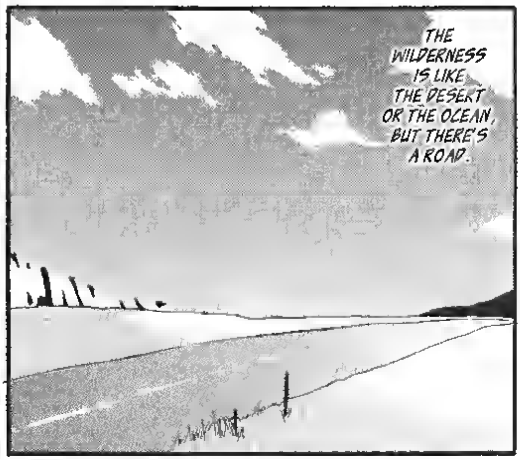
THAT WAY, MAYBE A SHARK WOULD EAT IT



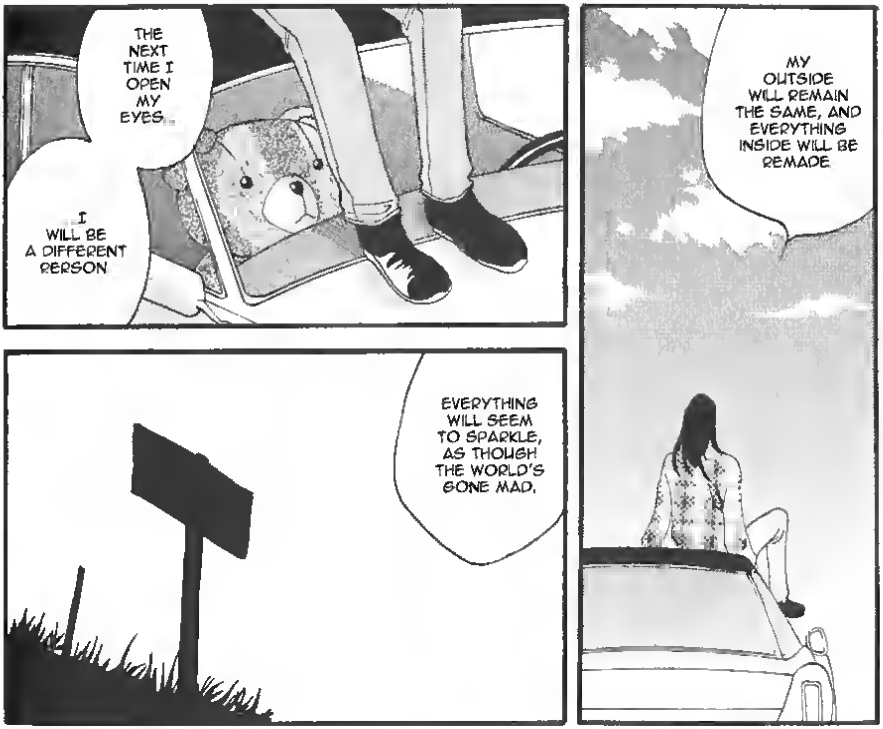

C·CLUB
Toyshop
BABY
WHERE TO NEXT, GWEN?
HA HA.
LET ME GUESS THE DESERT?

ROADS ARE CONNECTED TO SOMEPLACE, SOMEWHERE.




THE WILDERNESS IS LIKE THE DESERT OR THE OCEAN, BUT THERE'S A ROAD.

GWEN'S GONE SOMEWHERE THAT DOESN'T CONNECT TO ANYWHERE.
THE NEXT TIME I OPEN MY EYES, I WILL BE A DIFFERENT PERSON.


THE NEXT TIME I OPEN MY EYES...
I WILL BE A DIFFERENT PERSON
MY OUTSIDE WILL REMAIN THE SAME, AND EVERYTHING INSIDE WILL BE REMADE
EVERYTHING WILL SEEM TO SPARKLE, AS THOUGH THE WORLD'S GONE MAD.
THE SKY WILL BE BLUER AND HIGHER THAN EVER BEFORE.
MY BODY WILL FEEL AS LIGHT AS A FEATHER. I THINK.

THE NEXT TIME I OPEN MY EYES...

...I WILL BE A DIFFERENT PERSON.

Honeymoon.END

Afterword.

A terrifying thing has been loosed on the world. Hello, Kaori Ozaki here. Because this volume was being published, I was supposed to recheck my old manuscripts, but I couldn't look at them straight-on, I barely reread them at all. Once I'd started altering them there would have been no end to it, so I didn't do any correcting whatsoever. I'm feeling desperate.
To those who are familiar only with my current style and drawings, this book probably seemed like some kind of fraud. It's full of places (heck, it's nothing BUT places) that make me think, "If I drew this now, I'd do it this way", or "I could draw this so much better now". It's hard even to look at how unbearably green I was at the time, but I've decided to think "Well, that's how it was then", and forgive.

When I was seventeen, and was passing the issue of "Wings" that I was first published in around the school and making everybody read it and cackling over it, I really wasn't thinking much at all. The "desired course of advancement" slip I got from the teacher stayed blank until Graduation, and my friends were constantly making little-girl promises like "Let's die when we turn twenty".
I was only playing in the moment, and I never dreamed there'd come a day when I'd be an adult. I didn't think even of becoming a manga artist, I did the jobs I received as though they were part-time things, to earn pocket money.

I believe you've probably noticed, but my protagonists at the time died (or killed) quite frequently. Back then, I had no love for my characters, and didn't think of making my readers happy. I only drew as though I were challenging them - "Will you take this? How 'bout this??" - all the time. But really, as I told my (then) supervising editor once, "I'm drawing because I want to be forgiven."

He said, "Yes, I know. I understand just what you mean." I almost felt like I'd cry.

And, moving through these stories that I drew, something like a theme begins to evolve, little by little. From stories which ended in death (or killing), I moved to stories of people going through death and beginning to live again on the other side, and now I'm in the middle of writing a story about a person who absolutely CAN'T die, ever. I don't know whether it's a good thing or a bad one, but I doubt I'll ever be able to draw stories like the ones I used to draw.

The stories packed into this volume are something like my bones, stripped of all decoration. I'm able to have stuff like this released on the world (at this late date) largely because the readers sent lots of requests saying that they wanted to read certain stories "one more time". I thank all the readers and everyone at Shinshokan from the bottom of my heart, for saving these stories which were on the verge of just moldering away. Thanks to this, I feel as though I can advance once again.

But, um, people? There's no way a book like this is gonna sell . . .

尾崎かおり. 2002.

Kaori Ozaki

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